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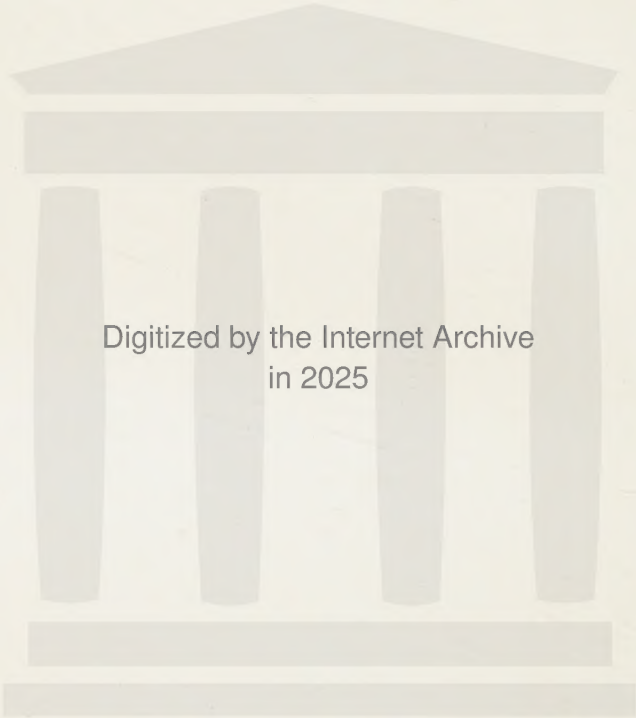
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SAINTE CHANTAL

ECCLESIASTICAL BIOGRAPHIES

SAINTE CHANTAL

1572-1641

A STUDY IN VOCATION

BY

E. K. SANDERS

AUTHOR OF "VINCENT DE PAUL," "ANGÉLIQUE OF PORT ROYAL," ETC.

LONDON
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN
KNOWLEDGE · 68 HAYMARKET, S.W.1
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1918

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

1572. Birth of Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot.	1574. Accession of Henri III.
1592. Marriage with Christophe de Rabutin Chantal.	1589. Assassination of Henri III.
1601. Widowhood.	1593. Henri IV abjures Protestantism.
1604. Meeting with François de Sales.	1602. Carmelites established in France.
1610. Visitation founded at Annecy.	1608. Publication of "Introduction à la Vie Dévote".
1615. Visitation established at Lyons.	1610. Assassination of Henri IV.
1617. Death of Marie-Aimée de Thorens.	1616. Publication of "Traité de l'Amour de Dieu".
1619. Visitation established in Paris.	1624. Richelieu becomes First Minister.
1622. Death of François de Sales.	1625. Congregation of Mission Priests founded by Vincent de Paul.
1627. Death of Celse-Bénigne de Rabutin Chantal.	1632. Execution of Duc de Montmorency.
1638. Visitation established in Turin.	1638. Imprisonment of Saint Cyran at Vincennes.
1641. Last Journey and Death of Jeanne de Chantal.	1638. Birth of Louis XIV.

July, 1767. Jeanne de Chantal canonised by Clement XIII.	April, 1665. François de Sales canonised by Alexander VII.

The Editions to which references are given in the present work are:
"*Sainte Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal, Sa Vie et Ses Œuvres*". 8 *vols. Plon, Paris.*
"*Œuvres de François de Sales.*" 20 *vols. Emmanuel Vitte, Annecy.*

INTRODUCTION.

THE life-study contained in the pages which follow makes no claim to a place among historical biographies. Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot, known as Sainte Chantal, was not closely concerned with contemporary events. It is her personal development rather than her connection with any public affairs which has value and interest for a later generation. Her history is a supreme assertion of the supernatural element in ordinary life. She was a traveller who, starting on her journey with a clearly-marked and time-worn route before her, found herself checked by the Touch that is not human and turned to a way, very difficult and hard to find, that led to a destination which she had not desired.

She is not widely known in England. Monumental biographies in her native tongue have obscured her individuality for the ordinary reader,[1] and the collection of Letters and remains which contain the contemporary record of her secretary is not easily accessible. There are also certain traditions regarding her which do more to stifle interest than to inspire it. To some she appears as the type of devotee who will sacrifice natural love and duty to a self-chosen avocation; to others she is merely the shadow and echo of François de Sales, one of the many saintly women presented in the literature of piety whose individuality is impossible to separate from that of the saints who gave them guidance and inspiration. Reference to actual fact is sufficient to confute either of these impressions, but there is another, less widespread but far more damaging, which

[1] The brilliant monograph by M. Henri Bremond is withdrawn from circulation.

demands closer consideration. The life that had an ordinary beginning in the surroundings of a provincial town and developed amid the deeper responsibilities of a wife and mother and the dignities of high position, progressed by gradual ascent to a plane that is above the range of normal experience. The place of Ste. Chantal is among the mystics, but she has suffered more than ordinarily from the vagueness of thought that characterises much which is said and written regarding mysticism. Again and again her name has been coupled with that of Mme. Guyon, and the fact that she never wrote for publication has left her memory defenceless before a suggestion that misrepresents her utterly. Mme. Guyon was exceptionally prolific as a writer, and her popularity among some of the Protestant sects in England has brought her work within reach of the ordinary reader; but whatever may be the view of the individual regarding her character and doctrine, there is no justification for confounding them with those of Jeanne de Chantal. The positions of these two women are in fact diametrically opposed, although to both the practice of prayer was the ruling object of existence. The one regarded herself as highly privileged, as exalted to a plane beyond the ken of ordinary humanity, and endowed with a capacity for union with the Divine Will which emancipated her from the laws by which human society is governed; the other ranked herself as the least in spiritual order among her associates, she had no glowing moments of achievement, and those deep experiences which marked her in the eyes of others as chosen by God to be tried and tested by the Divine Fire, increased her self-abasement. "I do not heed the suffering; my fear is that I am offending."[1] That was her protest.

As we follow Ste. Chantal to the end of her earthly pilgrimage, we shall find that the farther she penetrated into the mysteries of prayer the more habitual became her attitude of humble supplication and the wider the distance that

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1752.

divided her from the security of Mme. Guyon. There was nothing in the teaching that emanated from Annecy that could have alarmed even the timorous orthodoxy of Mme. de Maintenon, for the Foundress of the Visitation was as suspicious of exotic devotionalism as any of the critics of the Quietism of Saint-Cyr. "These wonderful things that are so exalted and so spiritual are as a rule of doubtful origin," she wrote, "and in particular, unless they are grounded on humility, you may be sure they are unreal."[1] Experience is the only root from which can spring sound judgment on the things that concern the spiritual life, and only the experienced accord due reverence to the possibilities of that aspiration of the soul towards God which we call prayer.

"One of the things that gives me most distress," said Ste. Chantal in her old age, "is to note how many persons talk about prayer and inward experiences and special graces, and how few of the practice of goodness and of definite self-denial. The soul that is intent on the enjoyment of interior quiet and on soaring among angelic visions, rather than on complete surrender to obedience and poverty, does not know what it means to imitate Christ."[2] Touches such as these —and her letters and recorded sayings give many other instances—reveal the type of woman that guided and controlled the contemplative Order of the Visitation for more than thirty years. She had a horror of all vain presumption in spiritual things, and could not take to herself the comfort that might have lightened her long period of inward anguish, because to do so would be to assume that she had a place among a chosen few whom God has set apart. Further, it may be said that there is no stage of her career at which, consciously, she enjoyed success, or was, even momentarily, satisfied.

The human and intimate side of Jeanne de Chantal's life is a hindrance to clear comprehension of her; in S. Teresa,

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1707. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i., p. 545.

in S. Catherine of Siena or her namesake of Genoa, we find characteristics that were super-normal at an early stage of development, but she seems to have stepped aside from the course ordained for her and, of her own free will, to have made the most tremendous venture of which a human soul is capable.

> In a dark night
> With anxious love inflamed
> Forth unobserved I went.

The lines of S. John of the Cross hold the suggestion of the awe-inspiring possibilities of her enterprise; she faced them when she made her choice, but her life afterwards made ceaseless and ever-growing demand upon her courage. Even before she retreated from the world she had been initiated into that Prayer of Simplicity which she was permitted to reveal or to explain to the many who were called to it, but for herself further and deeper experiences were reserved. In fact the sacrifice of those who enter the Religious Life, the abandonment of family ties, of friendships, and of all dear and familiar things, is only dimly the type of the ordeal through which the true contemplative must pass. The ordinary intelligence has no grasp on the meaning of full spiritual surrender, that martyrdom of love before which Ste. Chantal shuddered even while she welcomed it. But if we desire to approach, even distantly, to understanding of her, it is necessary to appreciate in the first place the unusual force of her human instincts, her vigorous and impulsive will, the strength of her affections; and then, if it be possible, to picture the suffering entailed on such a temperament by the process of ascent to a region from which human passions have been banished. Her story is one of continuous conflict between the human and the divine in a strong nature; if we cannot accept it in this aspect it contains little that is worthy of study. Moreover, in connection with it the question of the Religious Vocation, which to

some minds presents grave difficulties, must of necessity be faced.

The aspirant to the Religious Life is at all times confronted with a choice between the attractions and activities of the world and the peace of a surrender to obedience. The struggle varies in intensity according to individual temperament, but, ordinarily, the choice does not lie between opposing inclinations so much as between opposing duties and responsibilities. Life in the world does not, after all, represent a continuous procession of delights, and the call of Religious Vocation is at least as often a check to a settled course of self-denying labour as to a pursuit of vanities. Indeed the fact that it so often cuts across a life-work of acknowledged value provides the reflective with the most convincing proof of its supernatural reality. The vocation of Jeanne de Chantal was not without the destructive aspect which lays such life-decisions open to attack. There were those who had a natural claim on her who suffered by her response to it. She parted from her father in his old age, and gave herself little chance of intercourse with her only son. When she renounced her wealth and dignities her renunciation freed her from many onerous duties and from conditions that were distasteful to her; and when she removed from her native province to the little town of Annecy in Savoy, to found the new Order which François de Sales had planned, she was realising a long-cherished dream. These facts demand unflinching survey, and it must be admitted that if the years that followed had been passed in the peace of cloistered seclusion, there might be grounds for questioning her vocation, but the call that came to her was not to the calm of an established state of life, but to "launch out into the deep," and her obedience to it involved her in a series of ventures of faith that ended only when she died. It is our aim to follow her in the progress of her obedience, an obedience that after its earliest stage was free from any human element. The course of discipline that transformed

the nature of Jeanne de Chantal can be marked and followed as she advanced step by step upon her way, but it was not of human origin. At the beginning she owed much to the teaching of François de Sales, but she did not attain to full realisation of the life to which God called her till after his death.

The history of her progress which we attempt to give is drawn from contemporary records; in outline and in some of its details from the Life compiled by Françoise Madeleine de Chaugy, a Religious of the Visitation who was her secretary. Reminiscences of youth and childhood fall readily from the lips of the old, and in hours of much-needed rest la Sœur de Chaugy was able to lead the thoughts of her Superior to memories of bygone times. Her own literary faculty aided her in the arrangement of her notes, and her admiration for her subject taught her to be fearless of recording weaknesses and follies, for she realised that the truth concerning Jeanne de Chantal would be a more precious possession for the Community than any fabricated eulogy. This memoir, carefully preserved in manuscript, is contained in the first volume of "Ste. Chantal's Life and Works," published in 1842.

From 1604 to 1610, the year of her establishment at Annecy, we are admitted to a certain intimacy with her by means of the Letters of François de Sales. She was so vividly in his mind as he wrote that he depicts her vividly, with all the hindrances of natural disposition and outward circumstances that beset her spiritual advance. But her letters to him were restored to her by his brother after his death and she destroyed them, and it is therefore only after her arrival at Annecy that we have full opportunity for knowledge of her. A voluminous correspondence was a burden that could not be avoided by the Foundress and leader of a Community of women. Ste. Chantal deplored the necessity of continual writing, but the grandmother of Mme. de Sévigné was mistress of the art of self-expression. Nearly two thousand letters have been preserved, and in

them we find the gradual revelation of the meaning of the Call of God to her. Under normal conditions she had been a good woman with violent passions and a vigorous will. The process of her education after normal conditions had been put aside and she had, as it were, abandoned herself into the Hands of God, would, if it were rightly depicted, furnish us with an arresting and convincing study of the actuality and nearness of the things that are unseen. But she desired that her struggle and her eventual attainment should be hidden, and the endeavour to claim for her and for her teaching the reverence of those to whom she is unknown, is baffled by her life-long refusal to claim anything for herself. "I have no wish nor hope for myself," she said, "save that God's Will should be fulfilled in me." "We should not desire to excel save in the realisation that we are lacking in any excellence and wholly dependent upon God's good pleasure; that, as you know, is the mark of the Daughters of the Visitation"[1]—it was also the presentation of her own final position towards God and towards mankind; the least shadow of self-assertion would have clouded her vision and robbed her of the treasure that was hers in her last years.

"When you speak to me you seem to show me the innermost places of your soul wherein the Spirit of God abides."[2] Thus with characteristic boldness Angelique Arnauld summed up the impression that Jeanne de Chantal made on others at a time when all delight in prayer had been withdrawn from her; and Vincent de Paul, in the letter that describes his warning of her death, reveals the place she held in his esteem. As he knelt to pray for her recovery, he said, it seemed to him that he beheld her soul rise upward as a ball of fire until its identity was overwhelmed in the glowing radiance of God's Holy Spirit.[3]

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 492.
[2] J. M. A. Arnauld, "Lettres," vol. i., Lett. 9.
[3] Vincent de Paul, "Lettres," vol. i., Lett. 58.

Such were the tributes of those who knew her intimately, and we have not looked beyond the testimony of her contemporaries and of her own actual words and works for evidence in support of our contention that, in a supreme degree, hers was a life under direct supernatural guidance. The purpose of this book is to show the reality of the true vocation to Religion, and is not concerned with the miraculous powers attributed to its subject during her sojourn upon earth or afterwards. The claim we make rests on a different basis, and if to some, whose reverence for her may take another form from ours, the simple presentation of the woman Jeanne de Chantal should seem inadequate and limited, we venture to refer them to certain words of hers addressed to an eager admirer of François de Sales. Their application is easy to transfer:—

"Indeed, my dear daughter, no miracle that God might bring to pass by means of His most humble and most saintly servant could increase the love and reverence I bear him; for all the intimate knowledge of this holy soul which it has pleased God to give me convinces me that no miracle could be recorded that was greater than a life like this, filled as it was to overflowing with the practice of high virtues and with worthy deeds."[1]

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 566.

CHAPTER I.

THE EARLY LIFE OF JEANNE DE CHANTAL.

1572 to 1603.

Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot was the second daughter of Bénigne Frémyot, a prominent figure in the ancient city of Dijon, and of Marguerite Berbisy. She was born on 23 January, 1572. Her father remained loyal to the Crown at a time when Burgundy was in revolt; he risked the safety of his person and his possessions by an attempt to stem the tide, and it was said that his hair turned white from consternation at the murder of Henri III. But he was as loyal to the Faith as to the King, and the accession of Henri IV suggested a difficult dilemma. He summed up the position of many a French subject in those days when, at a royal banquet in his native city, he told the newly-crowned monarch that he would never have been able to cry "Long live the King" unless the King himself with all his heart could cry "Long live the Church of Rome".

It was possible to make a speech of such a nature to Henri IV with reasonable certainty that he would take it in good part, but there was no inducement to make it unless it conveyed the truth. Bénigne Frémyot was, as it implies, an ardent Catholic, and Jeanne-Françoise was brought up in an atmosphere of rigid orthodoxy. It was a period of controversy, the spread of Calvinism had been rapid, and under Henri IV it was not ruinous to a young man's prospects to be a Huguenot; yet it is curious that the daughter of a man of such pronounced opinions as President Frémyot should have run any risk of alliance with a heretic. The

account of this episode, however, is not legendary, it remained vivid in the memory of the heroine of it.

She was left motherless before she was two years old, and when her elder sister married the Baron d'Effran, a gentleman of Poitou, it was natural that she should follow the bride to her new home on a long visit. She was a very young girl; there is no reason to think she was especially devout; at a later time she loved pleasure and probably she did so then; she seems, moreover, to have been singularly unprotected. Nevertheless her character was subjected to two unexpected tests during that visit. Resistance to the first may have prepared her for the second and the two were coupled in her mind; but the first experience, although less open and sensational, was the most really dangerous. There lived in the household of the young couple an elderly woman filling the anomalous position of *dame de compagnie*. She was a survival of the surrounding of a former generation and her footing was firmly established. As a guest and a stranger Jeanne Frémyot came into close association with her, and after fifty years the thought suggested horror. This woman was eager to teach the art by which admiration may be won, to show the young girl how to paint her face and display herself to the best advantage (after the manner of the time there are dark hints of possible instructions in the practices of witchcraft). The existence of this woman would not possess much significance if she had not insinuated herself into the confidence of the innocent child who had come within her reach; but Jeanne Frémyot in her old age recorded her life-long belief that it was only the intervention of the Blessed Virgin which saved her then from untold evil. Such solemn words are prompted by the recollection of a real danger and a real escape. They would not have been spoken if she had not, at the time, turned a willing ear to suggestions that were completely new to her. The peril that succeeded this may have been more impressive to the

sheltered imagination of a Religious, but it was as nothing in comparison. Her brother-in-law had an intimate friend who desired her hand in marriage. The match was suitable and the young man, who had all external advantages, was violently in love. It is curious that M. d'Effran should have taken trouble to conceal that his friend was a Huguenot. If faith does not go deep in either party a mixed marriage may result in contentment; but the fact of this concealment shows that Jeanne Frémyot was suspected of pronounced views on such a question, and when, inevitably, the secret was divulged, she defied all attempts at influence or persuasion, even her lover's readiness to be converted for her sake left her unmoved. Strength and decision of character were needed, for it is clear that after her refusal of his friend her position as a guest in her brother-in-law's house became difficult, and she took the earliest opportunity of returning to Dijon and to her father's protection.

There was nothing austere in the life she led, no shrinking from amusements. For every unmarried girl of that period marriage was the goal towards which all else tended, and for her the desired consummation was reached when she was twenty. Her husband was chosen for her by her father after the manner of the time, but the choice was fortunate. In 1592 she married Christophe de Rabutin, Baron de Chantal, one of a brilliant, reckless race, who was himself distinguished by great charm, great gallantry as a soldier, and far greater virtue in private life than was usual among the members of his family. He took her to his castle of Bourbilly where she began her married life as controller of a large household, an insufficient income, and a notable array of debts.

The young wife had no taste for household management and disliked responsibility. Her father's house in Dijon was far less magnificent than her new home, but it was supported by solid wealth unknown to the Rabutin, and her father's wisdom and knowledge of the world had saved

her from any shadow of business care or difficulty. She was disposed to evade the proffered burden, but her husband made a definite appeal to her. He gave her unlimited authority, and concealed no detail of the embarrassed state of his affairs. If she had not been very much in love with him she might have refused to accept a task that was utterly uncongenial, but it was a most needful service and love like hers desires practical expression. She put away childish things therefore and became the woman of business, paying wages and checking accounts herself. M. de Chantal was frequently away, with the Army, and in Paris, but she remained constant to her home duties.

In these days she was rigid in obedience to the rule of the Church. She insisted that every member of the household (including her husband) should hear Mass on Sundays and on Feast days, and was herself present daily at the Celebration in the Castle Chapel. She was a true daughter of Bénigne Frémyot, and would have been faithful to the ordinances of the Church at any cost. But such fidelity does not imply that her religion was the mainspring of her life; quite clearly it was not so. She lived for those happy weeks when Christophe de Chantal was at home. When he desired to entertain she became the gay and brilliant hostess. She shared his pleasures as well as his interests, and shared them with personal enjoyment, though in his absence she did not seek amusement by herself.

Looking back over nearly fifty years in her cell at Annecy, one incident that is characteristic of the times grew vivid to her memory; it touched perhaps that sense of humour which she never lost. She was pursued by the attentions of a neighbouring gentleman who professed such a desire for her husband's company that it was difficult to escape from him. As time passed he grew bolder and at length appeared in her husband's absence, prolonging his visit on various pleas till nightfall. Probably he lived at a distance and had been such a constant guest that it was necessary

to offer him hospitality. But having done so, his hostess expressed her hope that the servants would do everything to make him comfortable as she herself had business which called her to the house of a friend in the neighbourhood. And therewith she mounted her horse and rode away, leaving her discomfited visitor to make the best of a solitary evening. It is to be supposed that he came no more to Bourbilly, but, though Mme. la Baronne was able to deal with him in such summary fashion and was well able to protect herself in her husband's absence, the story has its own significance, for she would not have been the object of such pronounced devotion, nor is it likely that her admirer would have embarked upon so bold a venture, if she had been entirely indifferent to admiration. She did not neglect duty for amusement, but when she was in the midst of such gaieties as home life offered her it is unlikely that she hid the personal charm with which nature had gifted her.

We may picture her then in those years of her married life as a brilliant and attractive figure, handsome and capable, vigorous of mind and body. There were periods when she was devout and gave considerable time to prayer, but these were only in her husband's absence and were the expression of loneliness and anxiety. She was not—and it is an important point—distinguished by any great strictness of life or by any longing for a fuller practice of her religion. She had found her vocation as wife and mother; her mind and heart were full of the interests natural to her position; the duties she had embraced against her will had become a source of innocent pride, and she seems to have filled the place where God had set her with notable success. Nothing could appear more unlikely, as we study those chapters of her early experience, than the sequel that they actually found at Annecy; in what she was then, according to her own reminiscence, there was no hint of what she was to become.

The first turning towards a graver view of life was made by her husband. For her own part she said that, when in

their times of separation she tried to be diligent in prayer, she found that all her thoughts and petitions centred on the preservation and the safe return of M. de Chantal. As soon as her desire was granted she lost all fervour and was satisfied with his companionship. But in 1601 M. de Chantal decided to give up his attendance at court and to remain at home. He was seriously ill and his recovery was slow; for nearly six months he did not leave his room, and during that time his mind was largely occupied with consideration of eternal things, and the ordinary distractions that the two had shared were in abeyance. His high aspirations and resolves were never tested by the reaction of restored health and the claims of normal life, for very soon after he was able to resume ordinary activity he was accidentally shot by a friend in a copse on his own estate. He died a week later.

Jeanne de Chantal was twenty-nine when her earthly happiness collapsed. She had borne six children, of whom four were living, the eldest, Celse-Bénigne, was seven, the youngest, Charlotte, was three weeks old. Her intense love for her husband made the care of his children a sacred trust, and, by natural capacity as well as by the experience she had gathered, she was eminently fitted to be the guardian of their interests. She had, moreover, a strong will, a developed mind and great aptitude for self-devotion, so that her circumstances and her personal qualities combined to indicate the path of life that lay before her with peculiar decisiveness. There was only one hindrance to the natural course that would have led her through bereavement to a career of dignified and honoured usefulness, but its importance was incalculable. Strong as she was in will and intellect Jeanne de Chantal was dominated by her affections, and her husband had held complete possession of her heart; the shock of his death did not unfit her for the conduct of domestic life, but it deranged the inmost centre of her being. She was in a sense unbalanced, and some of the develop-

ments of the first years of her widowhood must be attributed to the terrible convulsion of feeling through which she passed.

The usual attempts were made by sympathetic friends to intervene between her and her sorrow: "Those ladies who lived in the neighbourhood and were much attached to her were eager to visit her; her aunts and cousins from Dijon took it in turns to stay at Bourbilly, believing they were acting kindly in trying to distract her mind, though the real kindness would have been to have left her alone". When she went to her own room at night she would say to her maids: "Alas! why may I not mourn as I will? They intend to comfort me and they only torture me." That is the record of her first weeks of desolation. She was not as others, however, and it is not fair to blame the well-meant interference of the aunts and cousins from Dijon; they gave, no doubt, what they would have wished to receive under similar circumstances, and there was nothing to enlighten them as to the real position. They had known the young widow as an attractive girl in her father's house, possibly they had envied her the dignity of her married state, and had admired the skill with which she fulfilled the duties of her new position. She was a personage in the minds of the circle of relatives left behind in her native city, and the great tragedy that overwhelmed her increased her importance. Probably she was the theme of much discussion, and many kindly plans were made to prevent her from brooding and giving way to melancholy. And she herself did not realise at the time that God was dealing with her in those hours of agony. Her comprehension of this came to her long afterwards; while she was actually suffering she only knew that all human help had become a mockery, and the whole basis of her life, seemingly so firm, was overturned. She was not tempted to lose Faith; she had been nourished in it until it was part of her being. But her awakening to a real sense of the Divine Presence was sudden, and in its

vividness was so overpowering as to be in itself a separate and intimate pain. Harassed all day by her duty to her children and her household, and by the chatter of officious relatives, she looked forward to the night as a time when she might be alone and seek for help from God; her need of rest was secondary.

The English imagination concerned with a devout Frenchwoman will picture her as assisted and encouraged by a priest to whom her spiritual condition is an open book. Religious biographies suggest and foster such an impression, and the facts that would contradict it do not belong to general knowledge. But neither the parish priests nor the private chaplains of those days were equipped for the responsible task of spiritual direction; they were not as a rule men of erudition or of specially exemplary life. The history of Jeanne de Chantal is not directly concerned with the reform of the clergy, but recognition of the needs of such reform was one of the great influences on the period in which she lived, and her complete isolation in a time of great mental and spiritual struggle was indirectly the result of the status of the average priest. Long afterwards she described with wonder how God inspired her with the wish for spiritual direction.

"I did not really know what it was that I asked for," she says, "for though I had been carefully brought up, no one had ever spoken to me of a director or a master in spiritual things nor of anything that would suggest it. Nevertheless God implanted this desire so firmly in my heart, and my instinct to pray for a director was so strong, that my prayers had an insistence and vigour surpassing all experience."

At first she relied on the ardour of her prayers, although she might have sought in Dijon some member of a Religious Order competent to assist her; the desire seemed to her to be a supernatural suggestion, and without doubt it was her original intention to wait till she knew that God was grant-

ing it. The months passed in melancholy retirement at Bourbilly, and she may have welcomed a desire of her father's to have her with him for a time in her old home. It was more than a year since her husband's death, but there was no reawakening in her of old interests and pleasures. The advantage that the city offered her lay now in the facilities for prayer and worship in its numerous churches. She was more than ever anxious to avoid social intercourse. Her state of mind, if we may regard it dispassionately, was not normal, and although abnormal conditions may be almost necessary as a prelude to spiritual regeneration, her actual state at that time was not likely to produce healthy development. Some weeks before she moved to Dijon she believed herself to have seen in a vision the figure of the priest whom God would send her as her guide. Her thoughts and longings had centred on this great need of hers, and as she knelt before the shrines and altars of the city she prayed passionately that the response might not be long delayed.

The record of that time is given simply, without any attempt to point a moral. She was using prayer merely for demand, the real meaning of it was completely hidden, and, looking back from the pinnacle of knowledge to which the years had brought her, she would have regarded the sequel, with all the suffering that it entailed, as the discipline that her condition needed.

She made a pilgrimage one day to Notre-Dame de l'Etang, a church outside the city. She does not seem to have had special purpose in so doing, but was prompted by the restless instinct of an unbroken will that seeks for novelty even in devotion. She chanced upon an hour when a *coterie* of pious dames was gathered there for instruction from a religious who was their director. Mme. de Chantal was too well known to come and go unnoticed, and probably the devout practices that filled her leisure afforded topics for conversation to all the faithful in Dijon. Her appearance at this place and time was hailed with enthusiasm, and the

little circle opened to make place for her as a natural addition to their number. It is easy to picture the process of small events and influences: the band of women, devout and harmless souls, who had eschewed the frivolities of city life and given themselves to following their religion, with a fervour that was supported by their association with each other, and also by the novelty of the demands made on them by the priest who was their leader. Each one, it may be, was responding to the call suited to her capacity, and, individually, may have been admirable, but the need of the woman who came into their midst so unexpectedly was a thing entirely apart, with which they were not competent to deal.

The pious correspondence of three hundred years ago reveals to us that in those days the feminine instinct for recommending remedies extended itself dangerously into the domain of spiritual matters. The patient who accepts a prescription from unauthorised hands is responsible for the damage to her health, but her adviser is not innocent of blame. Mme. de Chantal was at that moment a sick soul, weary and restless, and not able to hide her condition from curious eyes. And these ladies, in their satisfied delight with the comfort they had found for themselves, were eager that she should have a share in it, and confident that she would reap the same benefit as they did. When we remember the vision that was still so recent and her avowed sense of the supernatural suggestion behind her great desire, it may seem astonishing that Mme. de Chantal yielded to these importunate counsellors, but it should be remembered that she was over-strained in mind and body and undisciplined in will and judgment. She was desiring a spiritual guide, and her friends represented that one of unusual capacity was willing to assist her. She did not think that she had found the real response to her petitions, but the craving for support was stronger than faith or patience. She accepted the religious of Notre-Dame de l'Etang as her spiritual

director, and she did so with deep and serious purpose. Nevertheless the step was taken on an impulse of despair.

Bitter experience in many directions followed immediately on this event. Very soon after her reinstallation at Bourbilly, her husband's father, Gui de Rabutin, demanded her presence as his permanent companion at Montelon, his home not far from Autun. The fortunes of her children must in some degree have depended on their grandfather, although Christophe de Rabutin seems to have had separate property, for the invitation was accompanied by a threat that their interests would suffer if it was refused. Compliance meant a severe tax on the fortitude of the young widow. Her father-in-law was violent and eccentric; in his old age he had slipped under the domination of a servant who was practically the mistress of his household. It may have been a desire to shake off these unworthy fetters which prompted his summons to Mme. de Chantal, but when she obeyed it he made no effort to secure for her her right position.

At Bourbilly, whether as wife or widow, she had ruled, and the instinct of rulership was in her blood always; but at Montelon she and her children were treated as dependents; they were obliged to associate on equal terms with the favoured servant and her family, and she was forced to be a spectator of disorder and waste in affairs of which she ought to have had control. For one of her temperament and capacity a sharper trial could hardly have been devised, but she set herself to do her duty towards her husband's father without resentment, to maintain peaceful terms with the housekeeper, and to content herself with the interest and distraction supplied by her children and by the many opportunities of kindness to the sick and poor on the estate. These were conditions that gave ample scope for intimate self-discipline; the young Baronne de Chantal, brilliant and admired, of a year or two earlier, could not conceivably have submitted to them, and in themselves they were good train-

ing for character. But the endurance that outward circumstances were claiming of her was only a small part of her record at that time; the religious of Notre-Dame de l'Etang must not be forgotten.

We do not know the name of the priest who assumed authority over Mme. de Chantal. It seems likely that he had grown old without acquiring much real experience in direction; the little group of women with whom he dealt in Dijon may not have offered him the material he desired, and perhaps he also had his visions of a saintly soul that he would one day meet and be allowed to mould to high perfection. It is clear that he was eager to assume the new charge entrusted to him, that he realised in it something unusual, and that his aspirations in connection with it soared far beyond his capacity. The result is painful to consider. At the outset, Mme. de Chantal was required to bind herself by four vows: (1) to give implicit obedience to her director; (2) never to withdraw her obedience; (3) to keep his directions to her absolutely secret; (4) to seek for no spiritual guidance other than his.

She had no knowledge that could defend her; she was longing for guidance, and she believed that she could have it only by the way of obedience; therefore she submitted unconditionally, and found herself so bound and fettered that her daily life was a veritable slavery. The description of it stands in the original record.

"He (her Director) loaded her with quantities of prayers, meditations, aspirations, acts, methods, and varieties of practices and observances, also with laborious systems of reflection and consideration. He required her to rise for prayer in the middle of the night, to fast, to use the discipline and many other external penances. She was so loyal to this good Father that she never shirked any detail of his rule, and remained in this condition of martyrdom two years and some months, tormented all the time by the sharpness of her desire for God, Whom she never found because the

path along which she moved was not that by which He intended to draw her to Himself."

Such were the conditions of her life for a period of nearly three years. For outward surrounding she had the dreariness of Montelon, where her position was ambiguous and uncertain, and she had no companionship save that of her father-in-law and his housekeeper; for inward solace she had the austere satisfaction of knowing herself to be obedient to a will other than her own and to be in a condition of continual suffering. The future held no promise of alleviation; but each day required courage, and this woman was of the fibre that does not altogether languish while the days offer opportunity of acquiring mastery—even though it be limited to mastery of self.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING WITH FRANÇOIS DE SALES.

1604.

Up to this point there are no features in the history of Jeanne de Chantal which might not be matched in the experience of many other women. A great calamity had disordered a life of calm well-doing, and convulsed a character that had been notable for wisdom and self-reliance, but there was nothing phenomenal either in the catastrophe or in its effects. In the reminiscences collected from her by her secretary there are references to prevision conveyed to her in dreams. While she awaited the director who was to guide her to a way of peace, she saw him in her sleep one night at Montelon, and knew from his dress that he was a bishop, though she had no other knowledge of him. At another time she woke with a voice in her ears which assured her that the way she was seeking would be reached by the gate of S. Claude. Subsequent events verified both these forewarnings, but it is noticeable that while they were fresh in her mind the importance she attached to them was not sufficient to have any influence upon her actions. The development of events may therefore be regarded as completely normal. It was in the spring of 1604, when her courage was beginning to fail beneath the strain of the tyranny, domestic and spiritual, imposed upon her, that a new element became manifest in the composition of dreary occurrences that formed her daily life.

The citizens of Dijon set store by all devout observances and the keeping of Lent was a serious matter. Since her

widowhood Mme. de Chantal had made a habit of spending this season beneath her father's roof, and in this year there was the particular inducement of a special preacher whose fame had spread from Paris to the provinces. It was the custom in cities where the faithful were numerous for the burghers to invite a well-known priest to give courses of sermons during Lent and Advent. Possibly the hearing of sermons held a more prominent place in the routine of Christian practices in those days than it does at present, and the stay of a celebrated preacher might reasonably be expected to result in the sensational conversion of one or more of the local citizens. It will be recognised, therefore, that the choice of a preacher was a serious responsibility, and the burghers of Dijon congratulated themselves on the good fortune that had secured for them François de Sales, the new Bishop of Geneva.

François de Sales believed that he was specially drawn to go to Dijon then; travelling was difficult, and there were many matters to claim him in his diocese, but he did not hesitate to set them all aside and embark on the long journey from Savoy to Burgundy. It is unlikely that Mme. de Chantal had ever heard his name before she heard that he was coming, and hers had no special associations for him. There was nothing to warn either of them that they were on the threshold of a great event, and the unconsciousness with which they approached it adds to its significance.

Jeanne de Chantal, delayed by affairs at home, did not reach Dijon till the second day in Lent and hurried at once to church; she was in the surroundings that had been familiar to her all her life; probably she occupied a place where she had sat a hundred times before, and her expectations soared no higher than they had done when any previous Lenten course began. She would have settled down, with discreet arrangement of her mourning garb, to listen, but when she raised her eyes towards the pulpit they rested on the face and figure of one who thenceforward till her

death was to be the dominating force in her existence. It is improbable that she had full immediate realisation of the importance of that moment. After-recollection is, necessarily, modified by subsequent experience; but she did recognise that she was face to face with the original of her dream, the director God had intended for her, and she believed that he had come too late.

In the records of her later life we find constant evidence of the sterling common sense that could accept and use to the utmost every difficulty presented to her, and this capacity was needed here. She seemed to have lost by her own folly a great good intended for her, but instead of giving way to despondency she saved what was still in reach, and all through Lent she followed every sermon and chose a place where she could see as well as hear this most inspired preacher, that she might have the full impression of his personality.

Gradually François de Sales became conscious of her. He can have had no listener more completely spellbound, and he described her to the Archbishop of Bourges that he might know her name. Now the Archbishop of Bourges was André Frémyot, brother to Mme. de Chantal, and under his auspices her first meeting with François de Sales took place. It came to pass on the initiative of François de Sales, but its importance to him at the time was slight, while to her it was infinite. She was in dire need, sustained by her indomitable will rather than by any help religion gave her; he was in calm waters, fulfilling the vocation that had claimed his life and growing constantly in capacity for helping others. This lady, sister to his friend and daughter to the venerable President at Dijon who was so frequently his host, could only mean to him another soul for whose assistance he might be given power. His life was very full, and, which is more important in this relation, he had already acquired the reality of detachment which alters the proportions of human intercourse.

At that time Mme. de Chantal was seeking the meaning of life. She had not attained to any understanding of it. Her mind was centred on her own spiritual state, but her egotism was only the natural result of the rule she had been following. Perhaps when she came to Dijon she was near the limit of endurance, and she allowed herself deliberately to stifle reason and foster imaginations that gave her respite from the strain of her daily life. She knew that she was bound by a vow which she honestly believed to be irrevocable; but daily she became more convinced that when she was near François de Sales she was in the presence of the being to whom God had given the power to guide her.

At first she resisted all temptation to consult him on any spiritual matter, but a friendly intimacy grew up between them and he observed her closely. One day, she tells us, he asked her if she meant to marry a second time. She told him "No". "In that case," he rejoined, "you should haul down your ensign." She was wearing certain adornments permitted to widows of high degree, and she knew that he referred to these. The next day she appeared without them, but his critical eye was still unsatisfied. "Madame," he said, "would you not be well dressed without these laces?" That night the offending trimmings were removed by her own hands. At a later time he asked her whether the cord fastening her collar would not hold securely without the tassels which ornamented it, to which suggestion her response was to take a knife and cut them off.

Such details were significant of that which lay before her, and without conscious acknowledgment she must have known that new possibilities were dawning. At any rate the trend of events was visible to others. The little company that had been so ready to claim Mme. de Chantal were not prepared to let her slip out of their ken. Her director was warned of the new influence and, as he was obliged to be away from Dijon, he commissioned one of his faithful followers to keep constant watch over her. That it should be

possible to give such a charge is a very plain indication of the completely false position in which she had become involved, and her consciousness that it was false must have increased daily. The teaching of François de Sales was as a gust of wholesome air in a closed room; the first effect was disturbance. Conscientious scruples fostered by the extraordinary methods of her confessor loomed large in her mind, almost obscuring the possibility of peace that was being revealed to her. Lent was very nearly over, indeed, and with it the opportunity of claiming what she needed, before she took any definite step. It was on the Wednesday in Holy Week that she obtained, by the arrangement of her brother the Archbishop of Bourges, her first private interview with François de Sales. The week following she asked him to receive her confession. To this he demurred, saying that women were inclined to give way to fancies in such matters, but eventually he yielded. After this their supernatural relation to each other became clearly defined in the minds of both. In the previous weeks it had been veiled by the innumerable considerations of likelihood and expediency that ordinarily prevent acceptance of the supernatural. There was no immediate outward result, however. Mme. de Chantal was told that she did well to continue as she was, and her deplorable promises to her confessor prevented her from revealing the full extent of the burden under which she laboured.

The day after Low Sunday François de Sales left Dijon. His manner of dealing with her had been unsensational, but he made it clear that he felt there was a special responsibility attaching to their intercourse. If he had not done so he would have left her more desolate than he found her, for she was returning to the country and he to his distant diocese, and all her circumstances, external as well as spiritual, seemed to militate against her hopes of further touch with him. It was he who insisted on the future—as yet mysterious—of their relations to each other.

His ordinary point of view towards his ministry must not be forgotten. From the time (it may be taken as two years previous to his visit to Dijon) that he made spiritual direction an important part of it, he concentrated himself on every soul with which he dealt as if its perfecting was his sole object and each was his unique charge. His published Letters show by their length and detail the tireless ardour of his service to others. The degree of his zeal would be incredible were it not for this evidence, and it would seem that he endeavoured to regard each spiritual charge as equal in importance and each as possessed of infinite capacity. To Mme. de Chantal nevertheless there was assigned a place apart, a place which he must have felt himself impelled to give her, for it is clear that she would not have ventured to make any claim, and desired only to share unhindered in the opportunities that his coming gave to others.

Dijon had in fact been very responsive to the personal influence of François de Sales. In the August following, when referring to his visit in a letter to the Bishop of Dol, he says that "it was fruitful in spite of my unworthiness, not only for those who gave me such a faithful hearing but also for myself, for I found in many that were there a reality of piety that has moved me deeply. Indeed I found some hundreds of persons there living very strictly and, in spite of all the distraction of their worldly affairs, they never miss their time for meditation." [1]

Probably Dijon was typical of other provincial towns. It was in such places that the faith—starved into inanition in the villages and corrupted in the capital—maintained its firmest hold. The Letters of François de Sales reveal the individuality of his correspondents, and many of them may be held to represent the devout middle-class woman of the present day as fairly as if no gulf of years and fashions divided her from her forerunner of three hundred years ago.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xii., Lett. 227.

When she was in Dijon, Mme. de Chantal shared the social life of the city, and after her widowhood she belonged specially to the most devout section. For its members, the ordinary routine of church-going, of works of benevolence, of small disagreements and discussions, was interrupted by the coming of François de Sales. Outwardly the interruption was not violent; but, even in those early days, there was a directness in his teaching which was disturbing to pseudo-piety. The result of such disturbance was sometimes as unreal as the original condition, but those who experienced it were subjected to a test that forced them to self-scrutiny, and small circles that threatened to stagnate were shaken into fresh and less quiescent courses of reflection. The development of Jeanne de Chantal is the extreme example of the effectiveness of François de Sales in waking instincts and intentions that lay dormant. But throughout his years of ministry he was responsible repeatedly for bringing drifting human souls to the turning-point where the choice of life must be faced and made. The vision of Christian life as a thing of splendour, of the Christian capacity as limitless, was always present in his mind, and each individual with whom he came into contact was a new example of the mystery of vocation. In the monotony of normal existence the average mind does not maintain itself at a level that will correspond to this high conception of its divine calling, and clearly it was part of the mission of S. François to the world to break through monotony and invite the great class of ordinary people—inoffensive and unaspiring—to readjust their outlook and grasp the privilege within their reach.

Such readjustments have an inherent element of danger, however, and this was demonstrated so strongly by the intimate friends of Mme. de Chantal, that it would seem to have been their special vocation to initiate her in those difficult and baffling experiences of the shortcomings of the pious which in the future were so often to be forced upon her. There were two in particular who hailed the advent of this new

teacher with an eagerness that, in outward expression, was not less than her own, and who were far more insistent in their claims on his time and attention. They were sisters, and both were well known in Dijon, the one as the wife of President Brulart,[1] the other as the Abbess of the Monastery of Puys d'Orbe, a few miles distant from the city. The Abbess and her Order have close connection with the relation of François de Sales to the Religious Life and the origins of his own Community; but Mme. Brulart is linked with those years of preparation which were so important a part of the vocation of Mme. de Chantal and with them only; she has no place in the work at Annecy.

It is likely that Mme. Brulart represents the most distracting influence with which the future Foundress of the Visitation was required to cope in that difficult period. Jeanne de Chantal was called to face a problem that brought the clash of natural and spiritual claims into sharp definition. The impulse towards wholesale sacrifice that was tearing at her soul was not in accordance with the dictates of common sense. Her life seemed to be marked out for her with exceptional clearness, and yet to her own inner vision, even before the coming of François de Sales, the way to which reason pointed so directly was not the way to which her spiritual growth was tending. From the first dawning of her sense of a religious vocation she prepared herself to meet open antagonism, and her resolve was stronger because of the necessity of combat. But in Mme. Brulart and others of her type she came in contact with something far more baffling than antagonism. In them she found the semblance of agreement; their profession and their outward practice of devotion exceeded her own. She saw them insisting on the claims of their spiritual advancement at the cost of family tranquillity, just as she was purposing to do; and as she observed them, with that shrewd insight which was an

[1] Among the published Letters of Direction of S. François de Sales a very large number are addressed to Mme. Brulart between 1604 and 1609.

inalienable part of her mental equipment, the possibilities of pious unreality were for the first time made known to her.

With that knowledge the distress of her inward battle increased tenfold because it ceased to be a clear contest between the natural and the spiritual. She had observed the capacity of self-deception in others, and acknowledged its existence in herself. Perhaps it was salutary for a novice in the devout life to see its possible exaggerations. Mme. Brulart was efficient as a demonstrator. The letters from François de Sales, intended to admonish and encourage her, bring her before us vividly, and we can picture the chill disillusionment that must have supervened on intimate conversation with her. Her favourite topics were the doings and the shortcomings of her sister the abbess, and the nuns of Puys d'Orbe; the obstacles which other people intruded on her own way of spiritual advance; and the comparative merits of the various preachers and confessors who came to Dijon. Chiefly she was centred on herself, and other matters held importance in ratio with their bearing on that absorbing pre-occupation. It does not seem that she had any capacity to reflect the spirit of François de Sales; it is clear that she did not understand it even faintly, for we find her writing to him to complain because the place she imagined herself to hold in his esteem was lower than that of Mme. de Chantal,[1] and she can pour out to him the alternation of admiration and of wrath with which she was inspired by the various priests who crossed her path. If he had been near to her he might have had the skill to mould and train the perversities which seem to have defeated other attempts at guidance, but when he returned to Annecy she expressed her fidelity to his teaching by a minute observance of the outward practices of devotion which was in exact contradiction to his real intention. Having irritated her husband into active opposition she bewailed his interference

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 331.

with her methods[1] and gave open expression to her regret that her condition as his wife precluded the possibility of entering Religion. Her inability to grasp the true nature of Vocation distorted her view of the Religious Life; while Mme. de Chantal listened constantly for that whisper of the Voice of God which should decide her future, Mme. Brulart made plans in accordance with her personal tastes and neglected her obvious vocation in a futile struggle to fulfil them. Yet François de Sales encouraged their intercourse, and does not seem to have realised how wide was the actual division caused by their contrasting temperaments; to an onlooker it may have seemed that the two were ranked together in his mind. In fact, however, he had even then a clear perception of a mysterious element in his relations with Mme. de Chantal. This is suggested in the note written to her at his first halting place after leaving Dijon: "It seems to me"—he wrote—"that God has intended me for you, and every hour I become more convinced of this. This is all I can say to you now."[2]

A week later he wrote from Annecy: "The further I am from you in space the more strongly do I feel the link between us".[3] The letter that follows is one of intimate spiritual direction written from the standpoint of close knowledge. "In everything and everywhere I desire that you should have freedom as to the methods by which you seek perfection. Beware of scruples, and rely absolutely on the truth of what I said to you for it was Our Lord's message. Beware of impatience and anxiety; there is nothing that hinders us so much in advance towards perfection."[3] These are not generalities, but are intended for the particular weaknesses of an individual, yet the Monk-Confessor had not ceased to exist, and there had been no suggestion of dispensation from the vows he had extorted. The position of Mme. de Chantal was a curious one; her great temptation

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 367.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. xii., Lett. 215. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 216.

came from one whom she already regarded as a saint; she could have been meek and faithful and obedient, striving to make the best of obligations which were the result of her own folly and impatience, but François de Sales prevented her. Possibly he had not full knowledge of her fetters. Certainly he had not as yet suggested their destruction, but it is clear he did not take them very seriously, and was confident that when the right time came they could be swept away. Meanwhile he wrote sometimes with a view to perusal by her director and sometimes for her eye only. He was aware of the perpetual scruples that afflicted her, but in his mind the issues involved in the true development of their mutual intercourse appeared of such infinite importance that he was bound to be deliberate.

During the summer months Mme. de Chantal must have passed through much distress of mind. Torn by the combat betwixt her love of truth, and her desire to escape from the blind guide she was pledged to follow, her uncertainties and continual revulsions of feeling can have left her little peace. At length in August she came to a decision. François de Sales with his mother, Mme. de Boisy, had arranged to make a pilgrimage to S. Claude,[1] and she, accompanied by Mme. Brulart and the Abbess of Puys d'Orbe, went there to meet him. This did not come to pass solely by their mutual agreement. On Whitsunday Mme. de Chantal reached a crisis in her silent struggle. She was at her father's house in Dijon and she sent to Père de Villars, Rector of the Jesuits, beseeching him to come and see her. He was a man of high repute for wisdom, and she laid before him the question that tormented her in all its detail. His reply was unhesitating—the guidance of François de Sales was God's gift to her; there were some indications that it marked her out for some special service, but in any case its coming freed her from the bondage under which she had

[1] A little town in the Jura province which became a place of pilgrimage in 1243. It possesses the tomb of S. Claude, Bishop of Besançon.

been labouring. Woman-like she was not able to accept advice that coincided with her wishes without further debate. Her first director, providentially absent from Dijon during the half-year that changed her course of life, returned after the verdict of de Villars had been given, and learnt from her lips the extent to which his authority had been undermined; the man who had contrived her fetters was not likely to accept defiance easily, and his reproaches must have been echoed by all those devotees to whose circle Mme. de Chantal had belonged. She was at a stage when conscience is exaggeratedly sensitive, and it is plain that her escape was not effected without many revulsions and spiritual upheavals, but François de Sales had bidden her to S. Claude, and his judgment must decide the future for her—that thought overruled her indecision and misgiving, and she embarked upon the journey in a spirit of exaltation that defied all her recent miseries. As soon as the opportunity came she gave him the history of the past months without further scruple or concealment.

Afterwards she remembered that the companions of her journey were relegated to the society of Mme. de Boisy, but at the time she was oblivious of them. It is plain that she and François de Sales approached each other with equal concentration of purpose, and it was inevitable that the normal requirements of Mme. de Brulart and her sister should be swept aside. If these two were able to appreciate the crisis in human experience at which they were assistants they might have derived more spiritual inspiration from contemplation of it than from any personal counsels of their director, but we have no means of ascertaining whether they profited by their opportunity.

The day he left Dijon he had written to her: "It seems to me that God has intended me for you, and every hour I become more convinced of this". She had been through much tribulation of spirit since then, and he knew her with far deeper intimacy, but his conviction had not altered. On

their first meeting at S. Claude he received all she had to say in silence, he spent the night praying, and the next morning his response was ready: "There is no doubt that it is the Will of God that you should accept my direction," he told her, and then, after a few minutes' silence,—"Shall I tell you the real truth? I must needs do so because it is the Will of God that I should. These four vows of yours have no object save to destroy your peace of mind. You may wonder that I have delayed so long in pronouncing on them, but I desired to be absolutely assured by God's Will, and that there should be nothing done in this that was not done by His Hand."

It was impossible for her to make any further question. If he was wrong in this, then all her estimate of him was wrong also, and the hope of peace which gradually had gathered strength from the day she first heard him had no reality. She knew that if she gave her allegiance fully, with surrender of mind and will, the life that lay before her would be wholly different from past experience. Already in her eyes the man who offered her his guidance was a saint; if she followed him at all she must go wherever he led her; there could be no half-measures. She was not deficient in courage and she had desired the decision he had given; yet the venture was a great one; it could not be made without some natural tremors. It was not very long since she had belonged to the normal world of normally unthinking persons, and already she found herself summoned to make the great assertion of the supremacy of things unseen, and to be a witness in daily living of that Touch upon her from the Hand of God of which her ordinary associates could have no understanding. There was nothing lacking to the solemnity of the occasion, and its importance to the further developments of her career cannot be exaggerated. She made a life confession before François de Sales and he gave her a paper bearing these words:—

"In the Name of God I accept the charge of your spiritual

guidance and will fulfil it with all the care and faithfulness of which I am capable without prejudice to my existing duties and condition."

The existence of this document alone is testimony that François de Sales regarded their relations as involving issues far more momentous than could result from the natural progress of spiritual direction. The note of the supernatural, and their mutual consciousness of it, must be realised and understood if their intercourse then or in later times is to have any meaning; but it may well be that for Mme. de Chantal the sensation of it was never keener than when she set forth again towards Dijon and Montelon, and the old life made new that was awaiting her.

CHAPTER III.

THE YEARS OF PREPARATION.

1604 to 1607.

THE intimate and pressing difficulty of life was not materially lessened for Jeanne de Chantal when she gave her solemn pledge of obedience to her new director. She still had momentary scruples over her broken vow, and she was tormented by suggestions of doubt in graver matters. She had suffered excessively in the past four years, and neither mind nor spirit could regain their true balance readily. She was fortunate in being met at every point by the calm wisdom of François de Sales. In details and in essentials he gave her the fruit of his trained judgment and of his years of prayer. He gave her rules, but the chiefest of them was that no rule was absolutely binding. "Do everything by love and not by effort, love to obey rather than fear to disobey."[1] These words, printed in capitals in one of his letters to her,[2] sum up the position he desired her to take towards his personal authority. The holy freedom which had been denied her in her first experience of spiritual guidance was now to be hers in as full measure as she was able to accept. Further he wrote to her: "Trust me on these two points. First, that it is God's Will that you should use me—have no misgivings. Second, in all that concerns your welfare God will give me the light

[1] "Il faut tout faire par amour et rien par force; il faut plus aymer l'obeissance que craindre la desobeissance."

[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xii., Lett. 234.

needful for your service. He has already given me so great a desire to serve you that it could not be greater."

The letter that contains these lines attains the proportions of a pamphlet, and it is full of personal direction and wide spiritual teaching. Reading it carefully and with her knowledge of the writer, she could not have failed to absorb the peace that radiates from every page. It was only when she forgot it, and the spirit of it, that the old miseries again possessed her. It became a saying among her serving-women when she returned to Montelon that "when Madame prayed three times a day she made everyone uncomfortable, but now that she prays continually, she gives no one any trouble". The difference between past and present is well depicted by that simple comment of the outsider. It was indeed the difference between the real and the unreal. François de Sales had discovered that when she was commanded to rise at strange hours for prayers and penances her maids were kept continually on the watch for her summons. This he would not permit, and gradually she learnt a simpler form of life, independent of service from others and free from the exaggerations of external devotion that had hampered her. For years she had been eager for sacrifice, but it was only from him that she gained knowledge of the meaning of surrender.

"You are ready to bear a cross but you want to choose it yourself, you want it external, bodily and of such and such a kind. And to what purpose, my dear daughter? Rather I desire that your cross and mine should be absolutely the *cross of Jesus Christ*, in the manner that it is laid upon us and in its character."[1] It was much more necessary for Mme. de Chantal to lay those words to heart than to practise ordinary self-discipline. She was eager for advance and for outward and visible marks of her inward dedication. The patience that François de Sales required of her was the most difficult demand he could have devised.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xii., Lett. 240.

It is well to realise her actual circumstances at the close of this year 1604 which was so important to her. She was dividing her life between the claims of her father and her father-in-law. She moved her children and their attendants from Dijon to Montelon, and in both homes her presence was important and was welcomed. She was a good woman of business, and in her children's interests she had much to occupy her business faculties. She had always been energetic, and we hear of long rides undertaken for various objects. Her days abounded in interest and occupation. At Montelon there was constant service to the poor; in Dijon there were like-minded friends who looked to her for encouragement; also she had always the development of her children to watch and pray about. There was, indeed, no possibility of question that the place she filled required her, and that it offered her all that is needed for contentment. Nevertheless she was restless. In the summer of the following year her difficulties had grown so serious that she determined on the long journey to Savoy and stayed for ten days with Mme. de Boisy, that she might have another opportunity of talk with François de Sales. If we desire to obtain a true idea of his method of spiritual direction, it is worth while to notice that he neither suggested nor encouraged this journey. It is quite clear that he considered their interviews in August ought to have made her footing firm enough to support her without personal intercourse for a long time. He wrote in April from Annecy: "As you are determined to see me again between this and Pentecost and are so hopeful of the result, then come by all means once and for all. The place where I can see you is with my mother at Thorens. When I am here I cannot promise a moment of my time. The date must be the Saturday after Ascension when I can give three or four clear days before the Feast of Pentecost, then it is necessary that I should return here. Be very careful to prepare so as to be sure that your journey will bear

fruit, and in such a way that this interview can suffice for several years. Bring it before our Lord in prayer. Search into every fold and crevice of your soul and consider everything that needs to be re-arranged or banished. But above all avoid any anxiety over your preparation, make it quietly and without strain. Do not start without obtaining leave from your Confessor. I should like to be certain that you discussed your intention with him before deciding on it." [1]

Compared with the usual tone of his letters there is a certain frigidity about this one, and she had to contend with opposition at Montelon and Dijon besides, but her determination was proof against all hindrances. In the event she had no reason for regret, and when the time drew near François de Sales displayed no more reluctance. The strength of her resolve indeed proved that her need was real and he gave full response. In the quiet of Thorens—which to him was home—they had calmer and more natural intercourse than had been possible before. It was then that he gave her the first hint of her future destiny: "A long time ago," he said, "God seemed to suggest to me the possibility of a special kind of life. But I will say no more about this to you till another year has passed." In this he was immovable, and he told her when she was starting again for Dijon that she must not fix her mind on any other condition than that of widowhood. At some earlier time, however, she had asked him if he did not intend ever "to draw her out of herself and out of the world". She had spoken with the impulsive vehemence that was always characteristic of her, and his response came after a pause, and solemnly. "Yes," he said, "some day you will leave everything behind; you will come to me, and I shall bring you to a state of entire deprivation for the service of God."

But he stopped there; he would not allow her to indulge in schemes for the future. She was to learn patience and the real offering of her will. As he wrote to her a few weeks

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 283.

later: "There must be no more of the woman in you, you must have the courage of a man".[1] After the visit to Thorens she was better able to fulfil that aspiration. She seems to have made a new beginning, and there is a marked alteration in the tone of the letters from François de Sales. He gives her his confidence, stating ingenuously that he would like her to know him as he really is, so long as she is not shocked by the knowledge.[2] She was, probably, not conscious of the change, but to the unconcerned reader it is clear that at this stage he began to draw from her. Until then he had imparted only. There had been time for growth since their meeting at S. Claude; also he saw her under better conditions and had a clearer vision of the possibilities of her nature. Her desire for complete withdrawal from the world never left her and seems to have been a constant theme of her letters to him. He could discern the immaturity of these aspirations, and suggested the advantage of accepting the difficulties given by God instead of choosing according to individual judgment. To bear the ill-temper of a cross-grained old man was, for instance, as he observed, a truer mortification than to obey a religious Superior.[3] Nevertheless he had this hidden wish of hers deeply at heart. He pondered over it with real anxiety, grasping that very clear proofs of a vocation to Religion were needed to justify Mme. la Baronne de Chantal in abandoning a life that was exceptionally full of legitimate and natural duties; but grasping also that if she had indeed been set apart for special service he would incur no slight responsibility by thwarting her.

In those years of her transition from the life of the world to that of the cloister, it is not easy to assure ourselves of her actual point of view towards the immense and tragic question that loomed in front of her. Probably she underwent many revulsions of feeling, and at times feeling surged

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 300.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 358.

up so high as to obscure the purpose that was growing in the depths of her nature. But S. François allowed no weight to feeling in giving judgment on any question, and, as she formed herself on him, she also did not allow it to impede the growth of that which had much more reality. The vocation that was the root of the Order of the Visitation was, assuredly, a thing of gradual and sure development but not of outward demonstration. Mme. la Baronne de Chantal maintained her place in any society she entered, and a very short time before her open renunciation of life in the world, she received an offer of marriage. This came to her as a shock. She had imagined her inward consecration to have set her apart, but François de Sales assumed the likelihood of "a little vanity, a little self-complacency" [1] as her share in the incident. It may have increased his desire to hasten her retirement from Dijon where the atmosphere was deleterious to a candid soul. A circle of which Mme. Brulart was a prominent member is likely to have indulged in many expressions and practices of a spurious and ill-regulated type, and, as the fashion for devotion prevailed in the city, it was reasonable of her suitor to imagine that the austere deportment of a very charming lady might melt into something softer if she was freed from that particular environment. His attempt and its failure had their part in her eventual and permanent enlightenment as to the choice required of her, and at the moment it made her more cautious in the ordering of her life. In the Lent of 1607 she elected to remain at Montelon and François de Sales readily approved her intention.[2]

More and more her mind was centring on the Religious Life and her obedience failed before any prohibition from dwelling on the thought of it, so that François de Sales was forced to modify his charge to her at Thorens.[3] It was becoming clear to him that she had the vocation of the

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 351.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 385. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 359.

true Religious and that its force would over-ride all human obstacles; but he could not disguise the great bulk of these obstacles, and the severe strain on every spiritual capacity that would be entailed by progress along the path she was choosing. It was not possible to give the guidance she might need when the distance dividing them imposed intervals of six or ten weeks on their correspondence. He knew she did not stand still in those long tracts of time during which he heard nothing of her, and she might be moving rapidly in a direction of which he had no knowledge. His faith in her and in a special and divine purpose for her was strong, but he believed that his own direction of her was also of divine appointment, and that personal communication between them was necessary to it.

After the visit to Thorens on which she had insisted, two years passed during which her chief support was the advice and encouragement which François de Sales was able to convey to her by letter. This was a period of great difficulty and uncertainty. We have noted some of the trials that it contained, and it may be conjectured that she grew weary of the conflict of opposing interests in her own heart and in the world outside. There lay before her always, however, the anticipation of a future meeting, and more and more as the time for this approached, every thought and hope was focussed on it.

Mme. de Boisy was waiting at Annecy to welcome Mme. de Chantal when, in the early summer of 1607, she arrived there for the first time. There seems to have been some foreknowledge in the minds of those concerned that there was something specially important in this visit, but its full significance was not yet revealed. In fact it marked the opening of the close spiritual association between François de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal. In the three years since the momentous Lent at Dijon they had grown in knowledge of each other and in mutual trust. The quality in her, which at first he had only dimly suspected, had declared

itself in a measure that went beyond all anticipation, and he grew more and more assured that he had discovered the force required to bring into being his long-cherished vision of a new form of the Religious Life. And if we follow their history closely we find that she filled a place in his life more important even than this. It is unquestionable that the Saint who died at Lyons in 1622 was on a spiritual plane far more exalted than that of the eloquent preacher who was the idol of Dijon eighteen years earlier. While it is quite impossible to gauge the importance of the part that Mme. de Chantal played in his development, his letters and his published writings declare the value that he set upon it. In her first years of awakening she was unresting, for ever craving for ascent, and, while her obvious need of guidance and control deepened his sense of responsibility towards her, it may well be that in giving guidance he learnt of her himself. Capacities in him, dormant till then, woke in response to her soaring aspiration. He had been greatly gifted, and the blessings of Heaven seemed to rest on all his work. He may have been in danger of contentment, but that danger ceased when he and she were in unity of mind and spirit.

After the first stage of their intercourse we find him striving really to reveal himself to her. It would only have confused their relations if he had done this in a mere desire for human sympathy. It is plain that he recognised in her a power that could help him, and the position demands a moment's consideration. In the Lent that carried him to Dijon François de Sales was in his thirty-seventh year. If records may be trusted he had practised from his boyhood the most resolute and undeviating self-repression and had attained to mental and spiritual detachment of a high order. If his close intercourse with Mme. de Chantal had been the result of mutual attraction in its ordinary sense, it would not reflect in the slightest degree on his reputation, but it would have checked his

progress on the way that God had set before him. The vocation of the saint is missed by those who bargain with human weaknesses, but S. François made swift advance from the moment that he entered on free communion of mind and spirit with the kindred soul that God brought near to him.

It should be recognised that Mme. de Chantal had misgivings in accepting the delight of a friendship that transformed her life, the simplicity with which he regarded it was at the outset impossible to her, and it was necessary that he should still her scruples by a plain statement. "After all we both belong altogether to God," he wrote to her, "undividedly, unreservedly, with no craving save for the favour of being His. If we found in our hearts a single thread of love that did not come from Him and belong to Him, we would tear it out instantly. Let us abide in peace therefore, and, using the words of the great lover of the Cross, say: 'From henceforth let no man trouble me for I bear in my *heart* the marks of the Lord Jesus'. Yes, my very dear daughter, if we knew that there was any corner of our heart that bore no imprint of the Crucifix, we would not suffer it to remain so for a moment."[1]

If Jeanne de Chantal had cherished the least doubt of the writer's integrity, the foundation on which she was constructing the fabric of her life must have collapsed. She recognised that her trust in him and in his judgment must be absolute, and thereafter did not waste herself in eternal reconsiderations. In spite of these preliminary scruples her candour of spirit was not less than his, and she was therefore fitted to interpret and perpetuate the work that he was destined to leave unachieved.

François de Sales is ordinarily regarded as a Frenchman, but he was a native of Savoy and he had the racial characteristics that are so often very clearly defined in small nations. We find the devout Frenchman tends to develop

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 358.

on lines of asceticism, the austerity is apt to be in ratio with the depth of his teaching. Such types as Saint-Cyran, Rancé or M. Olier spring readily to remembrance. But François de Sales the Savoyard was of a very different order. The intensity of his religious perception did not dim his natural gaiety: his social instinct, his love of life, his eager sympathy with human interests, were at one with his faith. We shall not find him at war with the spirit of the world but attempting to transfuse it with the spirit of Christianity, and it was the insuperable difficulty opposed to such an attempt that betrayed him into inconsistency. His personality is complex, and the presentation of him generally accepted is not a faithful rendering, for only one side of François de Sales is embodied in the gentle smiling saint of popular tradition. Gentle he was, assuredly, but beneath his soft touch an iron grip was latent. His hidden severities towards himself shortened his life. In his house at Annecy he slept in a mean and barely furnished room. All day, he said, he lived in magnificence as Bishop of Geneva, but at night he was only François de Sales.[1] In accordance with that idea he eschewed outward austerity that might alarm and alienate those whom he desired to attract, and never permitted himself to condemn practices that were not actually evil, realising that the rigour of the devout life should be concealed from those who had not learned to perceive its delight. Thus he has gained his reputation for tolerance, but his dealing with souls that were responding to the call of a special vocation could be severe and vigorous, and any suggestion that ministered to self-esteem was utterly repudiated.

When Mme. de Chantal made an offering of her handiwork for his personal use he tried to show her that she was absurd. "Truly I laughed and laughed most heartily when I understood that you wished your stuff to be worn by me and the worth of it given to the poor; but I am not mocking at

[1] C. A. de Sales, "Hist. du Bienheureux François de Sales" (1634), liv. 7.

your idea. I see that it springs from what is high though the form be a little mistaken. Would to God that I were worthy to feel that everything I used was used in His service, and that my life were such that what was needed to maintain it could be said to be employed for Him.

"And although I can laugh, my dear Daughter, I cannot do so without very great misgivings over the contrast between what I am and what so many imagine me to be. And who is to fix the price for me? For if I were to give to the poor a sum corresponding to the value I set upon your work, I should not have money enough in hand, I promise you."[1]

His disinclination to be placed upon a pedestal is manifested frequently in his letters. Writing of a gathering of children which he had been addressing, he says: "The applause of a large audience encouraged me to go on being a child among the children. I am told that I was a success and I think it was true. Would to God that I were indeed a child in innocence and simplicity! It may be that I am but a poor fool to tell you such things as these. That can't be helped. I show you my heart just as it is with all its different impulses, so that—as the Apostle says—you should not think of me more highly than you ought to think."[2]

Or again when the same intention takes more considered form:—

"I wonder if you really know me. I think you do, or at least the chief part of me. Naturally I am not prudent, and prudence is not a virtue that I greatly cherish. I only force myself to cultivate it because it is necessary—indeed extremely necessary. Also by nature I have no simplicity, but I have an admiration for it which amazes myself."[3]

We must accept his testimony that the simplicity which is so markedly his characteristic was acquired, but to its root his nature was sincere. In his letters to Mme. de Chantal there are constant suggestions that he himself has

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 351.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 385. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 406.

been weak or foolish, and the avowals that spring so readily under his pen are not mere careless confidences. It was his deliberate intention that she should have real knowledge of him, for the real union of soul that he desired could only be if she knew him as he knew himself. His candour with her expresses a humility that is essentially his own. He does not employ the language of extreme self-abasement which is made familiar by the writings of mediæval saints. His attitude is one of calm but unchanging self-contempt, and the adulation of his admirers claims from him quiet ridicule rather than violent repudiation.

We have seen how broad-minded was his acceptance of his intimacy with Mme. de Chantal. He can tell her repeatedly that she is continuously in his thoughts, that their hearts seem to him as one; nevertheless he will not tolerate the suggestion of human attachment to which a letter he received from her bore witness.

"You would have me pray that I may survive you? Verily may the good God do what He wills whenever He wills: when I surrender all to Him I should not except this! But you say you are not yet detached on this point! Truly what is this that you would say, my dear daughter? Is it possible that I—whose chief longing for you is that you should attain to the complete and perfect liberty of the children of God—that I have become your stumbling-block? But of course I understand, my daughter, that was not your real meaning. What you meant was that you regard the continuance of my life as being for the glory of God. It is really on the glorifying of Our Lord that your heart is fixed, not on the preservation of one of His creatures."[1]

We may picture him smiling as he wrote, yet in fact, beneath their pleasantry, his words suggest her coming initiation into the meaning of surrender, before the thought of which she might well tremble.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 351.

CHAPTER IV.

FRANÇOIS DE SALES AND THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

In 1607—a very important year to him and to Mme. de Chantal—François de Sales was forty. The career that lay behind him was not marked by conspicuous events, but it was one of continual advance both spiritual and external. In his mother's mind he had always been dedicated to the priesthood, but as the eldest son of a noble family and the possessor of most brilliant gifts it was natural that his father should have had other designs for him. His vocation was so marked, however, that family opposition subsided before it, and his first labours as a priest won him celebrity. He was employed in a Mission for the conversion of Protestants, and his eloquence and persuasive powers proved extraordinarily effective. As a mark of appreciation Granier, Bishop of Geneva, who had organised the Mission, made him his Coadjutor, and in 1602 he succeeded to the Bishopric. It was an office involving great labour and responsibility, and it carried with it a perpetual burden of discouragement, for the Catholic Bishop of Geneva could not venture within the gates of the city from which he took his title except at peril of his life, and even the charm and the ardent faith of François de Sales were impotent before the iron conviction of the Genevan Calvinists.

Although the duties of his diocese were manifold François de Sales would not have found full scope for his capacities, had he not come into contact with the revival of spiritual life in Paris in the year that he was consecrated Bishop:

from that time onward his sphere of influence widened till it ceased to have a geographical limit. We are not concerned, however, with the world-wide effectiveness of his life and teaching as a whole, but with his special relation to the Religious Life, and with the indications of his supernatural vocation as Founder of a new Order.

To reiterate the well-known facts of monastic disorders in times past can serve no useful purpose, and it should always be remembered that, if the blackest of the allegations could all be proved beyond question, they would provide no foundation for argument against the Religious Life in its reality. It is not indeed the extremes of abuse of the monastic idea that have made it suspect to so many minds, so much as a general lowering of standard and the evidence of innumerable minor laxities. This contention applies to all periods in the history of the Church since the first instance of license in a life consecrated by the threefold vow. The period of François de Sales was notably one of lurid misdemeanour in monasteries of both sexes, and in his own diocese he was obliged to deal with them. But the Constitution of the Visitation owed nothing to these violent experiences; in so far as it was indebted to any existing institution it was to that at Puys d'Orbe where the Abbess Rose Bourgeois de Crepy, sister of Mme. Brulart, held authority. François de Sales received a charge from Rome to investigate the practices of the nuns of Puys d'Orbe, and the fulfilment of the Commission was facilitated by the immense personal influence which at the outset he exercised over the Abbess.

Rose Bourgeois was a Religious by expediency and not by vocation. The family interest of M. de Crepy was sufficient to enable him to obtain this provision for his youngest daughter in the neighbourhood of her kinsfolk, and, by her contemporaries, her lot would not have been regarded as worthy of commiseration. The system by which such offices were allocated was simple and practical; it corresponded to

that which prevailed in past generations in England when the patron of a living relied upon it as the natural provision for a younger son. In both cases an immense spiritual responsibility was assumed by one who—in days when parental authority was rigorously exercised—had no freedom of choice, and in both cases the degradation of a spiritual standard was the inevitable result.

At Puys d'Orbe there was no sensational wickedness; the Abbess and her nuns were a company of ladies living together in a pleasant country house, entertaining and being entertained by a wide circle of friends and kinsfolk in the vicinity. They had a chapel, but they were not in the least punctilious about saying Office, and their inability to enter on the married state and their distinctive dress were the only marks of their position as Religious. This was the situation when François de Sales came to the neighbouring town of Dijon in the Lent of 1604, and to him it appeared entirely deplorable. He was swift in bringing the Abbess Rose into agreement with his desire for reform, and her first inclination was to enforce it upon her Community. Sweeping reforms have been imposed and maintained by the resolute will of the Mother-Abbess in other Communities, but François de Sales was well aware that the Abbess Rose was not of the right calibre for an attempt at drastic measures, and gentler methods were far more in accordance with his own practice. He was prepared to lead her step by step along the difficult path that lay before her, and he had no doubt of the ultimate success of their joint efforts. It is proof of his confidence that he brought his youngest sister, Jeanne de Sales, to Puys d'Orbe to be educated and if possible to find her vocation there. But his calculations had not made due allowance for the courteous but uncompromising opposition of M. de Crepy, who regarded the monastery as a pleasant resort for himself and his friends, and claimed absolute authority over the proceedings of his daughter. He was not disposed to associate himself with any plan to

disturb the existing state of things, and she had no stability of purpose, and relapsed into her original indolence when François de Sales was too far off to be a personal inspiration. In spite of her spasmodic eagerness and fervour the Abbess Rose was actually a hindrance to the reformation of Puys d'Orbe, which was not accomplished until she was deprived of office; it made so little progress under her rule that in 1610, six years after his first suggestions had been made, we find François de Sales still striving to convince her that the exclusion of male visitors from dormitories and recreation rooms is necessary to the seemly ordering of a Community of women.

The impression left upon us is not edifying certainly, yet these nuns of Puys d'Orbe were not much worse than other pleasure-loving women, for their sins against religion were sins of ignorance, and their daily lives did not fall far short of the standard set before them when they took the veil. They were capable of high aspiration also, for they expressed a desire to be affiliated to the Carmelites, when that Order (which had lately found a home in France) was established in the Rue de la Charbonnerie in Dijon. They recurred to this idea persistently, possibly because Dijon society was greatly stirred by the coming of the Carmelites, and thereby caused keen amusement to François de Sales[1] who could not reconcile their disregard of all enclosure and of every symbol of monastic life with a craving for the practice of obedience as laid down by S. Teresa. His method of dealing with them may have been open to criticism by those who advocated uncompromising condemnation of monastic laxity, but his tolerance was due to his grasp of those circumstances which were the occasion of the offence, rather than to any intention of condoning it. The passionate reformer is incapable of compromise, but François de Sales was not of these; he could not shut his eyes to the difficulties and the complicated interests that had

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 328.

become involved in the practice of monasticism. From the moment that the Religious Life was made the destiny of the supernumerary daughters of noble families it became inevitable that the standard of the Religious should be lowered. The austere Rule of ascetic Founders remained, but a gently nurtured woman, who had been coerced into embracing it because her family withheld a marriage dowry, could not be expected to observe it. And gradually there had risen a position of mutual obligation between the great families and the Convents, which raised insuperable obstacles to the wholesale restoration of the latter to the rigour of their full obligations. It is not necessary to enlarge on the damage to the Religious ideal that resulted from this system, it is sufficient for us that it did exist, and that François de Sales was called upon to deal with it as it stood. To his view the inward obligation of constant self-surrender was common to all Christians, and was rendered less difficult to the nun by reason of her opportunities for prayer; therefore he urged the practice of the interior life upon every inmate of a monastery. But he realised that many women were unfitted physically and mentally for the severities enjoined by the existing Rules, and that the highest spiritual endowment might be found in some who could not endure external hardship. To open the way to the life of prayer and to raise the spiritual standard for all who prayed—that was the first part of the mission of S. François; the second was the adaptation of the Religious Life to the capacity of those whose bodily weakness excluded them from Convents of strict observance.

The outward circumstances of the Bishop of Geneva were not favourable to an attempt to found a new Order. The geographical position of the diocese and the financial complications resulting from the Protestant occupation of a part of it, were grave hindrances to the success of such an enterprise. Yet his vision of it was only made the clearer by the harassing difficulties that were most calculated

to impede its realisation. The perpetual pressure of affairs had indeed taught him the value of silence and seclusion, and the longing for these expressed in his letters is pathetic in its insistency. "I intend to pass this Lent quietly in my own cathedral trying to reclothe my own soul, which is almost altogether in tatters from all the worry it has had to go through."[1] So he wrote to a layman at Dijon in the spring of 1607, and to Mme. de Chantal such plaints are very frequent. "It is now seven or eight days since I have been able to give a thought to my own soul, there have been so many others calling on me to save them."[2] That was his record when another Lent was near an end; and his sense of the very great needs of his own soul was an abiding one. A year later he tells her he is just leaving Annecy for Chamberi, where the Rector of the Jesuits (Père Fourier) was awaiting him that he might devote five or six days to his own spiritual readjustment. "While I am there, my daughter, I purpose to review my whole self, and put all the pieces back in their right place with the help of the good Father, who is extraordinarily devoted to me and to my welfare.

"Let me tell you something of myself, my daughter, as you wish it so much and you think it is of use to you, but it is for you and for you only. The business of this diocese does not come to me merely in a stream, it comes to me in torrents. I can say to you honestly that there has been no end to the labour since I began my circuit, and when I returned I found a task in which I was bound to take part and which has meant incessant occupation.

"I feel the love of souls to be stronger in me than is usual. My people are now, almost all of them, mine at heart, but there are always some hindrances, because I make mistakes from stupidity and lack of knowledge."[3]

Here indeed we catch a glimpse of the saint of the

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 386.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 391. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 328.

future realising in himself the encumbrance of external service, and eager to lay it down humbly before his Lord in a brief interval of silence. It was in such intervals, in the silence of true self-surrender, that he came to clear knowledge of the new field of labour destined for him, and was educated gradually for the vocation that was his by divine appointment. At first in solitude and afterwards by communication with Mme. de Chantal his vision of the new Order developed. It was at Annecy in the summer of 1607 that he first made it known to her, and at that time they were agreed in regarding its realisation as still in the distant future. The prospect of her own part in it tranquillised the uncertainties and questionings with which she had long been tormented; in spite of her many natural claims and duties she had not been able to reconcile herself to the permanent prospect of normal existence, and the establishment of the Carmelites in Dijon[1] and her frequent opportunities of association with them had increased her restlessness. It is plain that, in anticipation, the meeting at Annecy seemed to her to be momentous, in fact the course of her future life was to be decided. She had had more than three years' training and was beginning to grasp the meaning of those lessons in self-surrender which were such a very important part of her director's teaching, and she was aware that the test of her reality might be applied at any moment. She described her position to her secretary thirty years later.

"I went to meet the Bishop with all the indifference of which I was capable, without personal desire other than that of accepting whatever God should tell me through his lips, being absolutely certain that I should thus be shown the Divine Will and having no wish save to fulfil It. I arrived four or five days before Whitsuntide and during those days he talked to me a great deal, requiring me to reveal all that I had been thinking and feeling without

[1] In Sept., 1605.

giving me any hint of what was in his mind, only telling me to pray a great deal, and to resign myself entirely into God's Holy Hands. I tried to do this constantly."

It was the day after Whitsunday that he revealed his purpose. He began by suggesting that she should try her vocation for various existing Communities and forms of service, and found her ready to comply in every instance; but it was actually the case that none existed for which she was really suited, her health not being sufficiently robust for the Rule of those to which her spiritual aspirations drew her. After that preliminary which would have shown him any strong inclination in her, had there been any such, he unfolded the idea that so absorbed his innermost reflections.

There in his little town of Annecy she and a few others were to begin the Religious Life under new auspices; their Rule would appear to them a light one; the physical conditions would not be hard or arduous; there would be no severe fasting, no broken nights, no rigorous external penances, so that feebleness of body would be no reason for exclusion. But in place of visible self-discipline they were to aspire to hidden self-surrender; they were to make prayer the object of their lives, the prayer of communication which presupposes self-emptying that nothing may withhold the soul from God. The ideal was at once the highest and the simplest that the human mind is able to conceive, nothing less than the actual conscious sense of God's Presence at every moment. In ordinary life the attainment of that ideal is not possible, but to the vision of François de Sales a chosen few appeared as growing towards perfection in a state defended from distraction or the ordinary temptations of the world, and of these few Mme. de Chantal was to be the leader. It is unlikely that he had arranged the details of the Rule, and to them both the very obvious difficulty presented by her obligation towards her family appeared as humanly insurmountable.

Therefore the suggestion had the charm of a certain unreality, even while it thrilled her whole nature to ardent desire for its realisation.

The position of Mme. de Chantal at this crisis can only be understood if we remember that she regarded her relations with François de Sales as supernatural. It was not conscientious obedience to a spiritual adviser that she offered, but whole-hearted response to the intimations of the Will of God. She was, normally, a woman of exceptionally well-balanced mind; she was accustomed to bring practical common sense to bear upon the vicissitudes of existence, and when great mental strain had betrayed her into the lapse involved by her compact with her first director, part of her martyrdom was due to her consciousness of her own folly. And the proposal made to her by François de Sales had certain notable inconveniences. If he had discovered in her a vocation for some well-known Religious Order she would have had a hard struggle in convincing an older generation—represented by her father and her father-in-law—that it was her duty to fulfil it, but she would have had the support of tradition and would have been secure of eventual success. But it was quite another matter to proclaim a vocation for a non-existent Community, and to cast aside all her self-evident responsibilities that she might embark upon a spiritual venture, whose issues were uncertain, in a remote corner of Savoy. Even to contemplate the announcing of her intention to those most nearly concerned demanded that quality which her director had chosen to designate as "the courage of a man".

From another aspect also the proposal demanded courage. Mme. de Chantal was still living in the world but already she was rich in spiritual experience; no prospect of external hardship would have daunted her, but she had enough knowledge to understand that on the heights towards which François de Sales was pointing her the atmosphere

was so keen and rarefied that those who breathed it did so in suffering. It is possible that she may even have had some faint fore-warning of that which actually awaited her. In the world she had his continual and intimate support; the hardest path was made easy by his encouragement; but for the true Religious the path is not made easy, and those that face the life of the contemplative must do so open-eyed. Complete provision was not possible, for, to bear the cleansing agony that lay ahead, she needed the preparation of the intervening years; but the intimate suffering of the final months of her uncertainty served as a foretaste of what was to be.

Even during that period of happy intercourse at Annecy there must have been much that was disquieting in the questions that arose. The difficulties to be surmounted were of no ordinary kind, and the fine endowment of common sense bestowed on Jeanne de Chantal would have warned her that she was embarking on a hopeless enterprise if she had judged it by the standards of natural reason. She did not do so, however, for it seemed to her that the Voice of God had spoken in her heart, and she could not doubt that a Power above all likelihood would show her how her outward circumstances might be mastered. Her confidence had the support she valued most.

"Believe me, my daughter, either I am the most deluded man in the world or our resolve is inspired by God and is for His Glory."[1] That was the verdict of François de Sales, continually reiterated.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 436.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST YEARS IN THE WORLD.

1607 to 1610.

It was not until Mme. de Chantal went to Annecy, that being her second visit to Savoy, that the progress of events began which was to lead her to the fulfilment of her vocation. She would not have shrouded her inner life in mystery by any deliberate practice of deception, but there was little to indicate to those about her the important place held in it by François de Sales, and even when she returned from Annecy, although her plans had become far more definite than ever before, there seemed no prospect of putting them in force for a period of six or seven years. To the onlooker it would have seemed that there had been no appreciable change in her conditions since her widowhood began, and that the future offered no field for speculation or uncertainty, and there were moments when her own courage failed before the long vista of sameness that stretched in front of her.

But her way was opened by unconscious agents and most unexpected means. The first step is recorded by her secretary. After the procession of Corpus Christi through the streets of Annecy during her visit there Mme. de Chantal was greeted by a group of gentlemen in the court of the Bishop's house, who were all anxious to hand her to her own apartments. Turning to the youngest of them, Bernard de Sales, Baron de Thorens, she put her hand upon his arm and said laughingly: "This is my choice among you!"

This incident appears an insecure basis on which to found a scheme of matrimony, yet it was seized on with that intent by Mme. de Boisy. So great was her devotion to Mme. de Chantal that she desired an alliance between their respective families, and she fixed on her son Bernard and Marie Aimée de Chantal as the parties best suited for it. The idea found no great favour with François de Sales when it was first propounded to him, and it was regarded as completely impossible by Mme. de Chantal, who had no desire to complicate her own difficult dealings with her family by a further demand that might justly be regarded as unreasonable. But her disinclination to assent to one proposal from her hostess made her specially anxious to respond when a second came under discussion, although any forecast of the eventual connection between the two never suggested itself.

The youngest of her vast family, Jeanne de Sales, was specially dear to Mme. de Boisy. She was the first infant ever baptised by her brother, and was regarded as his spiritual charge. He desired that she should develop a religious vocation, and had entrusted her to the care of Rose de Crepy at a time when his sanguine hopes pictured the Monastery of Puys d'Orbe as a future centre of devout and prayerful life.[1] But neither were his expectations fulfilled at Puys d'Orbe nor did Jeanne de Sales show any inclination to renounce the cares and pleasures of the world, and Mme. de Boisy was tormented by anxiety, which was not unjustified, as to the influences surrounding her daughter and the further provision that ought to be made for her future. The subject was a natural one for discussion with Mme. de Chantal, and eventually it was agreed that Jeanne should be trained with the Chantal children, Marie Aimée and Françoise. There were difficulties with the Abbess Rose, and many diplomatic letters had to be written ; but at length the child was transferred to Montelon, and it

[1] In 1605.

is certain that she was secure of a special place in the heart of her guardian and hostess there. The plan was in all respects a wise and good one, and Mme. de Chantal embarked on it with happy confidence, little dreaming of the tragedy that lay before her. Jeanne de Sales had hardly had time to grow accustomed to her new surroundings when sudden illness seized her and she died.

In the record of the life of Mme. de Chantal we touch here on a curious point of conduct. It may be literally true that she would have sacrificed one of her own children to preserve the precious charge that had been entrusted to her, and she was well aware that the news that must be sent to Thorens would mean most bitter grief to Mme. de Boisy. The first moment of realisation that Jeanne was dead was a terrible one, and in it she was seized with a sudden impulse to pledge herself to give Marie Aimée in exchange, and satisfy the great wish of the bereaved mother. Kneeling by the child's death-bed she bound herself by a solemn vow before God to bring about the marriage with Bernard de Thorens. In those days it was a common practice to express violent feeling by a vow, and Mme. de Chantal's action was in accordance with all we know of her temperament at a time when it was still undisciplined. It is not the vow itself but her subsequent view of it which is remarkable. It proved to be a most valuable weapon in the first stage of the long struggle that lay before her, but it is not conceivable that, at the moment when she made it, her mind had space for elaborate calculations. Nevertheless the fact of its extraordinary usefulness prompted her to retrospective self-accusation of the gravest kind. "I thought," she wrote to Père de la Rivière sixteen years afterwards, "that if in the violence of my grief I made this vow, my father and others would be readier to forgive me for my part in the suggestion and I should be shown how to persuade them to consent."[1]

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 550.

If she was really blameworthy in this matter it was on account of the promptitude with which she used her opportunity directly she perceived its value. Jeanne de Sales died at the summer residence of President Frémyot, the Château de Tôtes in Burgundy, and the old man was therefore fully alive to the sensational aspect of the sudden tragedy. His daughter made her attack at once, and urged that Marie Aimée would be a consolation to Mme. de Boisy in her great sorrow. He had no clue to the reason for her eagerness, but he shared with her an extreme veneration for the Bishop of Geneva, and he was not indifferent to the obligation of her vow. His objection was one whose strength she had foreseen: the removal of Marie Aimée to Savoy would entail for him a final parting from her, and at her age (she was only ten) it was undesirable to establish her at so great a distance from her family. But from such an over-mastering desire as possessed Mme. de Chantal, and was the real motive of every act and thought, sprang the capacity needed to reason and persuade, and M. Frémyot was induced to write to Annecy offering the hand of his grand-daughter to the Bishop's youngest brother. Having performed this office in the complimentary phraseology that was customary, his letter concluded thus: "Yet I must confess, Monseigneur, that no power on earth save that which God has given to my daughter la Baronne de Chantal would have been sufficient to withdraw this child out of my arms and remove her from my sight".

This power which God had given to Mme. de Chantal did achieve wonders. Both the old men with whom she had to deal were accustomed to impose their will on others, and in dealing with her father-in-law the arguments which would have affected President Frémyot were useless. The Bishop of Geneva was nothing to him; the de Sales family was not wealthy, and the proposed marriage had no advantage from his point of view. It required great boldness even to broach the subject, but once her resolve was taken

she seems to have gone straight on without hesitation. The thought of her ultimate goal filled her with such joy that she could afford to disregard the violence of disapproval and abuse she might encounter on her way; and matters proceeded so rapidly that on 1 December, 1607, we find a letter from François de Sales to Mme. de Chantal acknowledging, in the language of compliment, the honour of his consent to the alliance between their respective families.

In spite of her confidence in her vocation and in the wisdom of her director it must have been very difficult for Mme. de Chantal to convince herself, when she returned to Burgundy from Annecy, that the prospect unfolded to her by François de Sales could ever develop into actuality. While she was in constant intercourse with him his enthusiasm was convincing, but when she came back to ordinary life, with its stifling pressure of familiar things, it was hard to maintain confidence in the future. It was in fact the death of Jeanne de Sales, in itself so tragic and so unexpected, that gave impetus to the progress of events. Two months after it took place Mme. de Chantal was conscious that she had actually embarked upon the road to her final retirement at Annecy, and even, although her real intention was still a secret, that she had gone too far for possibility of withdrawal. She stood in a most curious position, and only very remarkable qualities of mind and will could have supported her. She was susceptible to the claims of family affection, and much of her time was occupied by the daily demands of old and young. The distress her loss would entail to her old father was a special difficulty, and his advanced age might well have been used as a plea for patience till he should no longer need her. It is clear that she suffered greatly in looking forward to the pain that she must give, but her spiritual surrender to François de Sales had brought her peace. She had followed him in decisions against her own judgment and proved his wisdom. Her inward progress had become

inseparably linked to his direction and with it all her happiness. Her choice had been made long before the proposed marriage set an external seal on their connection and made her way clear to her destined home at Annecy, and, after the moment of her impulsive vow and its immediate effects upon her action, it may be said that every step she took was inevitable. To pause or to turn back would have involved denial of the faith by which she lived; but even while she longed for the consummation of her self-offering, there must have been many a moment of solitude when a dread of the unknown, like the dread of death that may assail a saint, chilled all her being.

François de Sales was not disturbed by any apprehensions or hesitations as he looked forward. He had no doubt as to the design of God for Mme. de Chantal and for himself, and he welcomed the incident of his brother's marriage with that warmth and ardour which no physical weakness or overwork could ever quell. But, as the wisest means to make the contract secure, he came himself to Burgundy[1] to introduce his brother to the family of the child-bride, and he and Madame de Chantal had further opportunity of developing the other scheme which lay between them but which was not yet public property. It was in August, 1608, that he made this journey. The claims of his diocese limited his absence to three weeks, and much of his leisure had to be devoted to the needs of those whom he had touched at Dijon on his first visit there. But these hindrances to their intercourse were calculated to deepen in Mme. de Chantal the hopes and the resolves that centred on their scheme, and he found her ardour for it growing too intense. Thenceforward he required that she should check her eagerness for the marriage. The expression of the same emotion by his mother and in his own home circle was a pleasure to him, but her standard must not be as that of others.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 461.

"It is a right desire, my daughter," he said, "but it is not worthy that you should set your heart upon it. Commend it to God and do all that you can fairly do to further it, as I shall also; but that being done, if it should be that God, Whose Eye can pierce the future, sees that it will not be for His glory or a help to the work we are intending, and orders otherwise, you should not on that account allow your rest to be disturbed for so much as an hour. The world will talk! What will people say? All that does not matter to those who have renounced the world."[1]

That was not an easy doctrine for a woman continually beset by anxiety for her own future and for that of a beloved child, when so much depended on the successful issue of the event which hung in the balance, but it was the only doctrine that was fitting for a woman who aspired to the Religious Life. By insistence on it François de Sales shows he was not content that she should wait till separation from the world made renunciation easier before practising submission of desire.

In fact the lessons of her life at that time were admirably suited to prepare her for the future. The trials she schooled herself to accept with patience were worked into the web of circumstance that was helping her to the fulfilment of her vocation. One that was a grave assault upon her natural dignity gave her an opportunity of revealing a part of her future intentions to her father. The ill-conditioned housekeeper who had made existence at Montelon a constant misery had intended to influence the marriage of Marie Aimée, and when the matter was concluded without reference to her, she revenged herself by poisoning the mind of her employer against his daughter-in-law. Her spite made her so reckless in her accusations, and the old man was so infatuated in his devotion to her, that a formal complaint of the misdoings of Mme. de Chantal was actually despatched to the President Frémyot at Dijon. As was natural, he de-

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 481.

manded explanations, and in the course of them discovered the position which for six years his daughter had occupied uncomplainingly in the house of her father-in-law, and was suitably indignant. He was insistent that she should leave Montelon for ever and take up her abode with him. She demurred to this or to any immediate decision of a future abode, but suggested that the moment was a good one for Marie Aimée to pay a visit to her future kindred, while she herself might have the solace of the instructions of François de Sales during the Lent that was approaching. President Frémyot was shrewd and his daughter desired to prepare him. It is likely that he guessed she was following a path that led to regions he had not explored, but if he had misgivings he did not allow himself to formulate them, and he did not attempt to dissuade her from her projected journey. Celse-Bénigne was already at an age when he needed tutors and governors, and Charlotte was considered too young for unnecessary travelling. These two therefore were left with their grandfather at Dijon and Mme. de Chantal, accompanied by Marie Aimée and Françoise, set out for Annecy to be the guests of Mme. de Boisy.

This visit seems to have been a complete success and to have fulfilled all the objects with which it was undertaken. The two children became familiar with the place that was to be their home (although Françoise was still ignorant of the future awaiting her). Mme. de Boisy was so delighted with the beauty and the disposition of the little bride that she was reluctant to allow her return to her native province; and Mme. de Chantal obtained for herself the calm and refreshment of which she was sorely in need, and had opportunity to listen once more to the teaching of François de Sales, and also to discuss with him the innumerable details which the outline of his plan left undetermined. Her visit achieved a further purpose which she had not foreseen. Her former expeditions had been undertaken for her own spiritual benefit. The time they were allowed to occupy was brief,

and on each occasion her thoughts had all been concentrated on her interviews with François de Sales. But in the leisure of this lengthened stay she was brought into contact with the ladies of Annecy and the vicinity. She made acquaintance with Mme. de Charmoisy,[1] whose name has so close a link with the literary reputation of François de Sales, and with the many others whose privilege it was to follow the spiritual guidance of the Bishop of Geneva. If she was soon to appear among them as the leader of a religious movement that centred in their native town, it was desirable that they should be predisposed in her favour, and in these quiet weeks, when she was allowing herself to rest before facing the troublous times that lay ahead, she won the affection as well as the admiration of all the circle on whom so much of her future tranquillity depended.

That visit must have held for her a strange mingling of emotions. There was everything to fortify her resolution. The unwavering certainty of François de Sales as to her vocation found due response in the deepest conviction of her own heart, so that the misgivings that had tormented her at home were stifled. The associations of the little town, where the influence of its spiritual ruler was so constantly evident, were dear to her already, and the weeks spent there increased her eagerness to make it her permanent home. It seems indeed as if there had not been even a single trivial circumstance to discourage or deter her, although she had been forced for the first time to regard the conditions of the life awaiting her in practical detail. Yet no content in the present or good auguries for the future could lighten the weight of dread oppressing her. She was a woman of deep and warm affections, and the vision of the pain she was so soon to inflict on those dearest to her, and the partings which

[1] Louise de Chastel, Maid of Honour to Dowager-Duchess of Guise, married 1600 M. de Charmoisy, kinsman of François de Sales. She is "Philothée" of "L'Introduction à la Vie Devôte".

she herself would have to face, obscured the joy of the more distant prospect.

On 24 April, 1609, Mme. de Chantal left Annecy on her return to Burgundy. She went first to Montelon, but she was at last determined to lay bare her mind before her father, and June found her in his house at Dijon. There were festivities in the town on the night of S. Peter's Day, and when the household went out to join in them President Frémyot and his daughter remained behind. She had agreed with herself that this was to be the hour of her ordeal, but when the time came and she stood at the threshold of his room her heart failed her, and she had to retire and pray for courage before she could return. She did at last approach him, however, and began their interview by declaring her anxiety as to the influence of the atmosphere of Montelon on her young daughters. Such a subject claimed her father's fullest interest and attention, and he saw such grave objections to his grandchildren growing up amid the irregularities of the Chantal household that he had made plans already for their removal from it. Celse-Bénigne was in his charge, and Marie Aimée was before long to be confided to Mme. de Boisy, and he considered that the time had come for the two younger children, Françoise and Charlotte, to be placed in an Ursuline Convent, and brought up among other young ladies of their own age and rank.

These wise proposals, made in all good faith by President Frémyot, gave his daughter exactly the opportunity she needed. If they were carried out her own nearest ties and responsibilities would end, and it was his suggestion and not hers that would sever them. Without further preparation she told him her belief that God was calling her to the Religious Life. His dismay was no less than she expected, but she may have feared a more vigorous exercise of parental authority. Even at her age it would have been difficult to set his will at defiance, and he was

a determined old man who might have proved obdurate on a point that concerned his own happiness so nearly. But the close bond of love between them entailed a measure of sympathy, and, though he had not accepted any warning, there had been many offered to him by her movements and her way of life. He was overwhelmed by grief but not by indignation, and he ceased even to expostulate when she assured him that she submitted absolutely to the judgment of François de Sales. He did not give consent, but he agreed that his decision should depend on an interview with the Bishop of Geneva, and even after that first hour of astonishment and distress there was not a vestige of bitterness to divide him from his daughter. It is a tribute to the character of each that they passed through this crisis without any disturbance to their mutual love.

In a quarter where she had hoped to find sympathy, however, Mme. de Chantal met with vigorous opposition. André Frémyot was a close friend of François de Sales. He was himself a priest, and his high office as Archbishop of Bourges should have pledged him to support an enterprise undertaken for the Glory of God and the service of the Church. But whatever may have been his opinions in theory, in practice he would not admit his sister's right to disturb the even tenor of their family life. He ranged himself against her as soon as he was informed of her intentions, and urged their father to use his authority to its utmost limits to frustrate them. But the reputation of François de Sales was her rock of defence. No argument or expostulation altered the fact that she was following his lead in all she proposed to do, and that his wisdom as a spiritual guide was too widely recognised to be assailable. The Archbishop was obliged to submit to the conditions that his father had accepted, and await the possibility of a conference before attempting to make any final decision.

The marriage of Marie Aimée at Montelon in October, 1609, brought the desired opportunity. The day after the

ceremony the Bishop of Geneva, the Archbishop of Bourges, and President Frémyot had a formal meeting to consider the expediency of Mme. de Chantal's proposed renunciation of her honours, riches, and responsibilities in the world. During their discussion she remained in prayer in her oratory, and eventually they sent for her to join them. In the presence of François de Sales her father and brother questioned her closely as to the foundation of her supposed vocation. The fact that she had nothing to conceal gave her courage. She gave them the outline of her inner life since her widowhood, and assured them that if they looked for God's Will only as she was doing, they would find a wealth of argument in favour of her purpose. Afterwards she laid before them the account of her stewardship in the interests of her children. Her close attention to business had borne fruit, and the complicated web of debt and legal embarrassment, in which her husband's property had been involved at the time of his death, was all unravelled. She was speaking to men of business and the blood of *la noblesse de la robe* ran in her veins. Perhaps she knew that this statement would move them in her favour more than the clearest exposition of her spiritual state. It was impossible to reconcile the fact of her achievement with a vision of her as the neurotic victim of a pious hallucination, or to deny that the woman who could bring the Chantal Rabutin affairs from chaos to prosperity single-handed, and in spite of the opposition of many individuals whose interest depended on the continuance of chaos, had won for herself the right to dispose of her own future.

It was on that note that the battle ended. François de Sales had listened in absolute silence. He was deeply versed in human nature and must have recognised her capacity to win her victory unaided, nor did he intervene when a further point arose that concerned him very nearly. In their treaty of surrender the defeated party stipulated that Dijon or Autun should be the scene of Mme. de

Chantal's retirement from the world, but the tender age of Marie Aimée was a conclusive argument in favour of her determination to establish herself at Annecy. She represented that her two younger children could still remain under her care, and that the way of life she proposed to follow would not preclude her from watching over their affairs and, if necessity arose, returning to Burgundy for special business. François de Sales agreed to this proposition, and once again appeal was made to the business qualities of her listeners, who marked the care with which she had made provision for the future and ceased to dispute the details of her plan. There remained only the time of her withdrawal to be determined, and there was no good reason for its postponement. Her father-in-law was in great distress at the idea of her departure, although he had treated her unworthily while she was with him, and President Frémyot urged that she should wait till he himself had no further need of her, as his advanced age and many infirmities made it unlikely that the time of waiting would be prolonged. But Mme. de Chantal had swept away many obstacles by the immense force of her resolution, and she was not now to be delayed by any human calculations. One by one she had detached the clinging hands that clasped her and held her back, and now that she was almost free she would not risk the possibility of having that desolating work to do again. Moreover, her resolution was altogether false unless God had called her to the making of it, and if He had, she had no right to hesitate any longer. She undertook to reconcile M. de Chantal to her plans, and she succeeded.

Once again bereavement made the way easier. Charlotte, the youngest of the children, died suddenly a few weeks after the marriage of Marie Aimée. She was very gentle and devout and specially dear to her mother's heart, but her death made Françoise the only one of the family requiring provision. The news of this calamity crossed on

the road to Annecy a messenger from François de Sales announcing the death of Mme. de Boisy. This was a real loss to Mme. de Chantal. The two had been on terms of the most sympathetic intimacy, and on her own account, and on that of many others who were dear to her, she mourned her deeply. François de Sales was devoted to his mother, and when he had done all that could be done to sanctify her last moments on earth he yielded freely to his grief. "*Je suis tant homme que rien plus*" is one of his descriptions of himself that defy translation.[1] Mme. de Chantal shared in his sorrow, and regretted for Marie Aimée the loving welcome to her new home that had awaited her. Nevertheless the death of Mme. de Boisy provided an answer to any criticism of her projected removal. It was unquestionable that the child-bride could not be left without a mother's care, and that expediency was being united to the deeper claim that summoned her to Annecy.

In the early spring of 1610 she said farewell to Montelon and rode away accompanied by her two daughters, by Bernard de Thorens, and by her kinswoman Charlotte de Brechard. Her departure was the cause of open and demonstrative lamentation among the poor of the neighbourhood. She paid a short visit to Autun and passed on to President Frémyot's house at Dijon. It was the season of Lent, just six years since the time of her spiritual awakening. Dijon was full of associations, and the hour of parting from her father and from her young son was drawing very near. The vocation that drew her to Annecy was irresistible, but the pain of severing the ties of a lifetime was not less because she felt that God ordained their severance, and it is clear that she suffered cruelly in the last weeks of her natural life. The ceremonious custom of the period ordained that she should say her farewells to a large assembly at her father's house on the day of her departure. It was a formidable ordeal, but when her friends and acquaintances were

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xii., No. 418.

disposed of, the worst still awaited her. Celse-Bénigne, who had inherited a vehement and impulsive temperament, chose these last moments to make a final appeal to her tenderness for him, and besought her not to go out of his reach. He was little more than a child, and could not understand all that was involved in the arrangement that deprived him of her; and when it was evident that nothing he could say would move her, he resorted to the vivid and dramatic act that has become celebrated. He flung himself across the threshold of the doorway through which she was about to pass, exclaiming that if she was determined to leave the world, she must do so across his body.

It was natural that she, whose susceptibilities were easily awakened, should pause an instant to collect herself, and, as she did so, one who stood by asked her "if she was going to cast all her plans aside because of the pleading of a child?" It was an ill-timed intervention and she attempted no disclaimer. "I have not ceased to be a mother, Monsieur," she replied.

The boy's action symbolised for her the dreadful element in the part she had accepted. She recognised that the human instinct to yearn in pride and love over her son is implanted in a mother's heart by God's design, and it was inevitable that she should feel a chill touch of doubt as to the justification of what she was doing. Annecy and François de Sales were very far away; she was in the home of her youth which she had left as a bride, and at her feet lay her first-born child in an agony of grief for which she was responsible. But there was no argument she had not met already, no aspect of the case she had not faced. Even if it was conceivable that she had chosen wrong, her choice was made long ere she came to Dijon. And so she accepted the symbol of her sacrifice and stepped across the body of her son to seek her father for their last interview. She had no remonstrances to fear from him, but his generous self-repression did not soften the force of his bereavement, and they were

so closely linked in sympathy that she had knowledge of all he strove to hide. There remains to us the letter which his daughter was to deliver to François de Sales as a memorial of his courage and devotion.

"Monseigneur," he wrote, "this sheet might well be marked rather with tears than with writing, since my daughter—on whom I chiefly depended for comfort and rest in my old age—is leaving me a father without children. Nevertheless, Monseigneur, following the example of your complete resignation to the Will of God at the death of your mother, I yield myself wholly to that which pleases God; and as He claims my daughter for His service in this world that by such means she may attain eternal happiness, I desire to show that I care more for her welfare and her peace of mind than for my own inclinations.

"So she goes to consecrate herself to God, but it is on the condition that she does not forget her father who has loved her so dearly. She takes two treasures with her. I regard one of them as fortunate because she has become a member of your family; I hope the other will be preserved to us. As to her son, I will give him such care as a good father gives to one of his own, and so long as God thinks good to leave me in this vale of tears, I shall see that he is being grounded in honour and virtue.

"I make humble request, Monseigneur, that I may continue in your good graces, and I ask you to believe that there is nothing—except the grace and blessing of God—which I desire so much as that you should hold me in remembrance." [1]

The old man's share in his daughter's dedication has its own peculiar beauty. There is no hint of indignation against the leader under whose guidance she was leaving him, nor a querulous note in the natural expression of his grief. Perhaps for her the last embrace would have been less heart-rending if he had allowed resentment to mingle with his sorrow, and her resolution had been taxed beyond natural

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Appendix E.

limits when at length she found herself in the travelling carriage that was to bear her away from Dijon. Her companions noted that she lay back in absolute silence as they rolled through the familiar streets, but as they passed through the city gates into the open country she sat upright and repeated "the canticle of deliverance".

CHAPTER VI.

LA MAISON DE LA GALERIE.

1610 to 1611.

"If you think well you might arrange to be here by Palm Sunday. (I say here for it is not seemly that you spend these great days in the country.) Your rooms await you, our modest table and simple entertainment are offered to you most heartily. And when the festival is over you will make whatever plan you think best for settling our little lady in her home." [1]

Thus simply did François de Sales welcome Mme. de Chantal when at length she was coming to him, freed from her worldly ties. His mind was full of grief for his mother's death, and the interests of the child-bride with life just opening before her were kept very prominent; for the moment indeed he seems to hold their own visions of the future in abeyance. He wrote on March 11; on the 29th Mme. de Chantal passed through the ordeal of her farewells at Dijon, and April 4—Palm Sunday—found her in Annecy. Most of the journey was performed on horseback, and its discomforts and anxieties were the best possible antidote to her regrets; she reached her destination with unfeigned content, and, as François de Sales had planned, was fortified by the spiritual exercise of Holy Week against the practical cares that were the preliminary of her final retreat. More than a month was occupied in organising a household for Marie Aimée and appointing wise and responsible attendants, and only when this was done, and Françoise could be left tem-

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 581.

porarily with her sister at the Château de Thorens, did Mme. de Chantal turn to the thought of her own future. Her first act on her return to Annecy was to direct that a deed should be drawn up transferring all her property to her children. When she had signed it she was ready, in the freedom of absolute poverty, to fulfil the vocation God had given her.

We do not give its full value to the faith which she displayed if we overlook the vagueness of outline characterising the scheme of François de Sales at that epoch. It is one of his recorded sayings that he could not see why he was called the Founder of the Visitation, seeing that the Order had not done what he had desired to do and had done what he did not desire. In 1607, when Mme. de Chantal paid her first visit to Annecy, we learn that he revealed to her his plan for a Religious Order, but she did not put on record the detail of his plan; very likely he did not embark on detail, and even the rough outline of the work he contemplated bore little resemblance to that which he accomplished. "I feel I must tell you that the type of life which we have chosen attracts me more and more every day, and it seems to me that in it there will be good service to Our Lord. I foresee plenty of difficulties, but believing that God wills it I have no anxiety: all we need is a little patience."[1]

This is a fair example of the frequent references to the project in the letters from Annecy to Montelon or Dijon. Sometimes the Bishop recounts an interview with some ecclesiastic of special wisdom and discernment who has bestowed warm approval on his ideas for the new Order, but very rarely does he write anything that sheds light on their actual form. It was his meeting with Mme. de Chantal that gave substance to his dream, and in its first phase as in its later developments it seems to have been modelled on his idea of her. She was a woman of unusual capacity

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 464 (July, 1608).

in practical affairs and much given to wise benevolence, and although his touch with her concerned her spiritual life, it was impossible to eliminate the qualities that made for active usefulness from his vision of her. What wonder then that the new Order of which she was the representative grew familiar to his mind as "The Sisterhood of S. Martha," and that he pictured it as testifying to the possibility of uniting self-devotion in works of charity with that exalted aspiration in the way of prayer which he had discovered in her life?

"I should like to see S. Martha, our beloved patroness, taking her sister's place at Our Lord's feet while her sister goes to finish the preparation of supper. Thus they would share in rest and labour as good sisters should. And I believe that this is what Our Lord would have approved. It seems to me that she was wrong to suggest leaving Our Saviour by Himself. It is a strange idea that I should attempt to criticise S. Martha, is it not? But it grows out of my love for her, and in good faith I believe that what she did not do herself at the time, she would like to have done now by her daughters, and that they should divide their days, giving a good part to outward work for others, but the largest share to the interior life and to contemplation." [1] In this most characteristic passage, written in 1607, François de Sales gives a clue to the root idea of his new Order, and it is curious to note the extent of his later deviation from it. When Mme. de Chantal came to make her abode in Annecy, the plans on which she had staked her future had not really emerged from idealism, for we find that her director was proposing to depend on mutual charity rather than on a Rule for the maintenance of unity among the group of women he hoped to gather together. He did not intend to copy, or to compete with, any of the Orders already established; his congregation was to have greater freedom than the Religious Life had ever sanctioned; they were to

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 408.

be known to the world by their services to the poor while maintaining the devotion of the contemplative at home. If his Order could have been composed only of saints, and the places in which they ministered could have been cleansed from depravity, his ideal might have found practical expression, but the Rule of the Religious as it existed was the growth of experience, and the reasons on which it was founded were not of a kind lightly to be swept aside. In those troubled times women of gentle birth were protected from insult or violence by the fact that they were Religious, but they required male protection otherwise, and the recognition of the Privilege of the Religious assumed the existence of the Cloister (even when its limitations were only nominal). It was the intention of François de Sales to break a tradition sanctioned by many generations of opinion, but he failed to fulfil it, and the points that eventually differentiated the Order of the Visitation from other Orders were not those on which he had intended to insist. It was left for Vincent de Paul, the peasant priest with his band of homely Sisters of the Poor, to accomplish the innovation which the Bishop of Geneva had attempted.

There was another factor, however, besides the pressure of tradition which had weight in the development of the new Order. Circumstances had brought into prominence the active side of Mme. de Chantal's nature, but, in their years of close association, the qualities that were more hidden were revealed to her director, and his ideal for his Order altered with his gradual realisation of her capacity. Her own position at that time towards the Religious Life in general or towards her own individual vocation is not recorded, but it may be conjectured, for her convictions were of the type that grow but do not alter fundamentally. In later years she does not seem to have been eager for the practice of external charity; in her eyes every soul that was dedicated to the service of God strengthened the Church, and she did not desire that the effect on others should be

visible. Indeed her letters suggest that she regarded a craving for visible usefulness as militating against the self-surrender which should be the ideal of the Religious; the life consecrated to God was used by Him; the certainty of this was the direct result of consecration; and His methods were hidden. As her Order grew under her guidance we find this thought pervading it. The primary object of every true Sister of the Visitation was to realise her Lord as ever present with her, and her service was to be to Jesus Crucified, a constant silent offering of herself in union with His Offering. Under this inspiration the inner life of some of them—and these were not always the most capable in organisation and in leadership—seems to have attained the heights of real holiness; there is, however, no means of estimating their effect upon their generation. But these hidden lives were a later product. There was much to be endured by the Founders and the pioneers of the Order before the treasures of their privilege could be shielded from public scrutiny, and at the outset they were hindered by one of the examples of human weakness that are so constantly to be found in the business records of a Religious House.

For a considerable time there had been an idea afloat among devout people in Annecy and its neighbourhood of inviting the Carmelites to establish a House in Savoy. It had been encouraged by their Bishop and at the end of 1609, before his own project had been made public, it had taken definite form, and two Foundresses had agreed to be responsible for the endowment of a Carmelite Convent in the town of Annecy. They altered their intention, however, after the purchase of the building chosen for their purpose, and one of them, Mme. de Cusy, approached François de Sales with the suggestion that their bounty should be transferred to the use of a Congregation to be newly founded. She had intended to retire from the world to the Carmelite Convent, and her niece, Mme. de Chapot, whose

fortune was a part of the endowment, also intended to ask admission to the Order.[1] In transferring the destination of their munificence they transferred this other purpose, and when François de Sales, who responded warmly to their suggestions, accepted their offer as a heaven-sent assistance to his plans, he pledged himself to accept them among the first members of the new Order. The position of Mme. de Cusy was somewhat peculiar. In 1606 there is a reference to her in a letter from François de Sales to one of his brothers,[2] to the effect that she and her husband had been to see him at Annecy, both being desirous of entering Religion, but that nothing had come of it. Her husband was extraordinarily fervent, and maintained a Rule as strict as that of a Capuchin in his own house; the desire that led him to François de Sales in 1606 had not abated four years later, but Mme. de Cusy was spasmodic in her ardour, and it is evident that the promise of a gentle Rule in a new Order appealed to her as a way of escape from the searching demands of the Carmelites. Under these circumstances it is not astonishing that Mme. de Chantal regarded this lady's association with the approaching birth of the new Congregation as bearing with it the promise of disaster, but she had no choice and was forced to acquiesce. It was the first of many occasions when the trustful charity of François de Sales involved her in a train of difficulties, and in this instance they were only temporary. In fact Mme. de Cusy completed every arrangement and appointed with Mme. de Chantal for the inauguration of their new life at Whitsuntide. Mme. de Chantal repaired to Annecy relying on the external provision that had been promised, only to find that, at the eleventh hour, the Foundress had withdrawn from her compact and decided finally and irrevocably (in defiance of her husband's wishes) that her vocation was for the married state!

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 560, 591.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. xiii., Lett. 335.

No one was more relieved at this decision than Mme. de Chantal,[1] but it placed her in a difficult position; just when she had left herself without personal possessions, the house, to which she was about to withdraw for the practice of the poverty she had chosen, vanished. There was no practical method of reconciling the destitution extolled by Francis of Assisi with the simplicity of life she coveted; as yet she was not a Religious, and it was necessary that Mme. la Baronne de Chantal should be provided with permanent shelter; moreover it was hard to see how a Congregation of Women could be founded without the promise of means to buy their daily bread. François de Sales was in nowise daunted by the catastrophe however; his chief regret was the delay that it entailed, and this he made as brief as possible, for the foundation appointed for the Feast of Pentecost was postponed only to Trinity Sunday.

In the Faubourg de la Perrière near the edge of the Lake there stood a little house known as *La Maison de la Galerie*. This the Bishop acquired, partly by payment and partly by credit, thus making himself personally responsible for this first Convent of the Visitation. It was a venture of faith, its full recklessness judged by human standards is hard to estimate when centuries of success have justified it, but in fact his own credit as a man of sane judgment and the whole future of Mme. de Chantal was in jeopardy. His last letter to her before her entry within the cloister has special interest.

"I begin to have anxieties and fears for the temporal things of our future House. As concerns the spiritual I believe Our Lord takes charge and I have no fears; He will bestow manifold blessings on it.

"My daughter, I must needs tell you that I have never before seen how completely you are my daughter as I do now; I mean that I see it as in the Heart of our Lord.

"Oh, my daughter, how I long that one day we ourselves

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 599, *note*.

should be consumed that we may live entirely for God and that our life may be hid with Christ in God! Oh when shall we have life, a life that is not our own, and when will Christ live in us wholly! I shall go now and make my prayer on this for a little while; I shall make appeal to the Royal Heart of Christ for ours.

"We need to gather the force of courage that we may offer the highest, bravest service to God that is possible to us; for why should we believe that He has made two hearts into one if not that that one should become extraordinarily daring, constant, generous, faithful, and loving in and for her Creator and her Saviour." [1]

The position, even from a merely human standpoint, did demand "the force of courage," and nothing but the deep unity of purpose which François de Sales struggles to express could have sustained them in the vicissitudes of the first months of their great venture. Mme. de Chantal had won her father's blessing and her brother's sanction for it, but in leaving Burgundy she left behind her all the support of high position and family connection, and she entered on her new life bereft almost entirely of interest as well as of worldly goods. Considering the extent of her sacrifice the promise of the future was small and uncertain; there was always a certain dignity in the retreat of a wealthy lady into an old-established Religious House, even when her retreat seemed to involve a flight from natural responsibilities, and there was never any doubt as to the prospect awaiting her; but the way of life on which Mme. de Chantal had chosen to embark seemed to offer no element of stability; it was entirely experimental and therefore precarious.

The disaffection of Mme. de Cusy and her niece left her with two companions who were to share with her the honour of inaugurating the new Congregation. One of them, Marie Jacqueline Favre, was a native of Savoy, the eldest daughter of President Favre, most intimate of the

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 601.

life-long friends of François de Sales. She is known in the Correspondence of both the Founders as their Eldest Daughter (*la grande fille*), and she held an important place in the history of the Order. In the difficulties of the first months her presence at *la Maison de la Galerie* had great importance because it implied the sanction of her family, well known and respected in the town, to the innovation which Annecy was to witness, and her powers of government and organisation were invaluable at every stage; but it was only a very short time before his need of her that François de Sales was secure of her as a recruit.[1] She was a strong and turbulent character, and in her girlhood her expressed ambition was to be a widow as that was the condition which gave the best promise of independence. She excelled in dancing, and it was at a ball given in her honour that she was seized with a conviction of the vanity of human ambitions.[2] Such sudden convictions are, not infrequently, the temporary reaction from great excitement, but Jacqueline Favre passed on from a mental conclusion as to the folly of ordinary pleasures to that spiritual state known as conversion. Before the process was complete Count Louis de la Thouille, a brother of François de Sales, desired marriage with her, and the proposal gave great delight to her family, but, as the final outcome of much uncertainty, she refused marriage and declared her desire to enter Religion. Many circumstances brought her into constant touch with François de Sales, and it was his influence over President Favre which obtained for Jacqueline permission to retire from the world and to do so under the experimental conditions of *la Maison de la Galerie*, instead of trying her vocation in some Order of established reputation. There were tendencies in her nature which might have made her a dangerous acquisition, but his know-

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 572 (March, 1610).
[2] *Ibid.* note.

ledge of her was equal to his knowledge of Mme. de Chantal and the future justified his discernment.

The third member of the valiant little company had found her vocation by a very different path. Jeanne Charlotte de Brechard was the youngest daughter of a Burgundian gentleman; she lost her mother in babyhood, and grew up under circumstances of exaggerated neglect and cruelty. There was some link between her family and that of President Frémyot, and she was godmother to Charlotte de Chantal, but she does not seem to have had any intercourse with François de Sales or indeed with anyone capable of giving her any consolation during her unhappy girlhood. Her spiritual capacity developed in defiance of circumstances, and she proposed entering a Religious Order before she had any real knowledge of the meaning of the Religious Life. Her close personal association with Mme. de Chantal began early in 1607; at that time her whole mind was set on trying her vocation with the Carmelites, and they were ready to receive her, but she had no means of transporting herself to Dijon. Mme. de Chantal's coach solved the difficulty, and when it became plain that the health of the postulant unfitted her for the Carmelite Rule, Mme. de Chantal's kindness relieved her from the misery of returning to her father's house. At Montelon she had an interview with François de Sales, and she was one of the party that left Dijon for Annecy in the spring of 1610. There was no distaste or shrinking in her case to be got over; she approached the Religious Life with eagerness, and her strongest earthly tie was her devotion to Mme. de Chantal. But she came empty-handed; her father made no provision for her, and no family support or interest accrued to the Community on her account.

It will be recognised that, humanly, the prospect of firm and prosperous establishment for the new Congregation was very slender; but François de Sales managed to infect the townspeople of Annecy with his own enthusiasm, and on the appointed day of Installation a little procession was formed,

and the three ladies, escorted by three of the brothers of François de Sales, and followed by a devout concourse of men and women, walked through the streets from the Bishop's house to *la Maison de la Galerie* where a party of ladies were waiting to receive and welcome them. It would seem as if nothing in those days could be accomplished without a number of spectators and an elaborate ceremony, and in this case the setting was so humble that there was no accommodation for the assembly, and Mme. de Chantal and her companions could hardly force their way into their own chapel. Only the lateness of the hour relieved them of the presence of intruders, but at length they found themselves alone in the retreat that had so long been the goal of their hopes. It was the Feast of S. Claude as well as Trinity Sunday, and the date having chanced and not been chosen, seemed of most happy augury as being a further fulfilment of their leader's dream concerning "the way of S. Claude".

"Here," said Mme. de Chantal, "we are in the place where we shall find the rest for the children of God." And they knelt down to glorify God and pray that He might give them grace to fulfil the purpose for which He brought them there. Afterwards they embraced each other, and Jacqueline Favre and Charlotte de Brechard promised obedience to their future Superior. For these two there had not been the immense burden of preliminary anxiety that had weighed upon their leader, nor could they experience the same relief at its suspension. They went to their rest and slept profoundly, but she lay awake, her whole being stirred to its depths by her thanksgivings. Thirty years after the memory of that night was vivid, and the picture which she gave of it is still unfaded by reason of its complete simplicity. She fell asleep near two o'clock, she says, and shortly after started awake again. It was not possible that she should be left to enjoy her haven of happiness and peace unmolested and Satan himself attacked her. Spiritually she was in darkness, but mentally she saw with the utmost clearness a vast array of

difficulties that impeded the possibility of her venture prospering; some of these she saw to be insurmountable, and voices whispered that it was defying God to embark on such an undertaking without providing means, urging innumerable arguments until her natural reason was dismayed at being so irrevocably committed, although all the time her innermost being made appeal to God protesting that throughout she had sought His Will in all things. For two hours the assault continued, and then peace returned to her and a thankfulness that was more exultant than before.

At five she rose and roused her two companions. It was the opening of the first day of their novitiate, a solemn moment, and they put on the severe garb that was to mark them as retired from all worldly vanities, with a certain excitement, for such external expressions of an inward purpose have a value in a woman's eyes which a man is not capable of understanding. When later in the day they presented themselves before François de Sales he regarded them with some astonishment. The dress itself was a simple gown of black, with a narrow white collar, but they had folded round their heads a black bandage that descended half across their foreheads and completely covered their hair; over this was thrown a sort of hood of black material which was quite shapeless but could be drawn down so as to hide the face. "Truly the headdress these ladies have chosen is not of the most becoming"—was his smiling comment to his brothers on his return.

It was natural that their fervour should betray them into small absurdities. Charlotte de Brechard, when she renounced the world, trampled her ruff and her hoop underfoot, and derived, no doubt, real satisfaction from contemplating their fragments. But at a further stage the destruction of former adornments or the exaggerated disfigurement of their own persons would have afforded no content to either of the three. For they were the pioneers of the Visitation, and the two first Sisters as well as their

Superior were faithful representatives of its spirit. And the spirit of the Visitation was alien to outward demonstration; it aspired to pass unnoticed, to be hidden from the applause as much as from the criticism of human spectators; the self-discipline and the sacrifice that it demanded of its daughters were devised so as to be concealed from the scrutiny of prying eyes.

To the onlooker the ordered harmony of the Religious Life seems to depend upon tradition and on the sense of the inevitable involved by an unbending Rule. The position of these three novices is not easy to realise. Their enclosure was to begin on the first morning in their new abode and to be observed throughout the year of their novitiate, and they abandoned the names by which they were known in the world, Mme. de Chantal being addressed as Mother and her two companions as Sister. They had great difficulty in the saying of their Office, Mme. de Chantal, who should have led them, found the pronunciation of Latin very hard to acquire, and it was necessary that M. de Boisy, brother of François de Sales, should give them daily lessons in the ceremonial for which they were to be responsible. It is customary to entrust the founding of a new branch of a Community, or the reforming of one that has fallen into disorder, to an experienced Religious, and no one was more careful than Mme. de Chantal in the selection of persons of proved wisdom and discretion for such tasks when, at a later time, it was her duty to provide for them. But she herself had no means of communication with any Religious in this strange venture of hers. She and her companions submitted to enclosure in the narrow limits of their little house and garden. Annecy itself was an obscure city beyond the borders of her native country, and her retreat was in a distant suburb of Annecy. There were many days on which there was no assurance of provision for the next; there was not one point in her external conditions which could be regarded as reliable or

fixed, and where interior things were concerned she found herself to be in the position of a novice without a novice-mistress, and entrusted with the training of two veritable novices for a life of which she had no experience and which was as yet undefined. Each day that opened was likely to bring with it questions and experiences that could not be foreseen, and it is impossible that she can have escaped the burden of anxiety.

But if the Founders had needed support for their belief that the foundation of the Visitation was directly of Divine inspiration it was given them in the history of those early months. The life of the new Order depended on the accession of more members, but its humble and unimpressive conditions were not calculated to inspire confidence where confidence was needed. Many a young girl whose heart had been stirred by the glowing words of François de Sales, and whose imagination was touched by the stories of Mme. de Chantal and her companions in *la Maison de la Galerie*, might aspire to join them and take her part in this venture in devotion, but the disposal of a woman's future depended upon guardians, and those who entered on the Religious Life were supposed to do so with assurance of permanent provision. Now nothing could have seemed less permanent or assured according to human calculations than the experimental Congregation in the House by the lake-side; nevertheless the daughters of noble and wealthy families in Savoy, and from the neighbourhood of Dijon, arrived in rapid succession to try their vocation there; the original three were left to themselves for six weeks only, and as each of the new recruits brought with her an annuity rather more than sufficient for her needs, the initial difficulty in providing daily sustenance subsided.

It is possible, however, that as exterior anxieties lessened those of the inward life became more pressing. In after years Mme. de Chantal led and directed the Community,

but in those days she was a learner; her ideal for it was founded on the suggestions she had received from François de Sales; she was not—and in connection with her masterful temperament this point is of importance—following out a theory of her own. In every detail it was François de Sales who guided. The future influence of a Community depends largely on its original members, and he made a close study of each one of the little group as they gathered round Mme. de Chantal. They were unconscious of it, yet in fact the Constitutions of their Order were moulded by his observation of them. Day after day he would come into their garden at recreation time and lead them on into discussion of subjects that concerned their life in common. Self-revelations made unconsciously were the surest guide to their real mind, for, with the one exception of their Superior, they were all young, and all were full of aspirations after ideals which were still undefined. In the freedom of recreation, each one betrayed her natural bias, and thus their Director learnt how to provide for the schooling of the wayward and the indolent as well as for the restraining of the fervent, so that each one might have her share in the spirit of the Visitation.

Mme. de Chantal was attacked by severe illness in the first year of her cloistered life. There was so much illness in the little house by the lake that it is possible the situation was unhealthy, but illness might also be accounted for by the sudden alteration of conditions sustained by each one who entered there. They came from prosperous homes and were, presumably, accustomed to normal variety and exercise; but in this first House of the new Order not only were the sisters confined within very narrow limits, but they seem also to have been subjected to hardships which their strength was not able to endure. They were allowed to vie with each other in the use of those external mortifications which were regarded as a privilege by a devout Religious; and in addition their real poverty imposed on them suffer-

ings from monotonous and insufficient food and lack of fuel in the depths of winter. Under such circumstances the health of a gently nurtured woman does not remain intact, and the fervour which may sustain her spirit is no support to her physical strength. Experience had to be bought, and the maladies of the first Sisters of the Visitation—one of whom died while several never recovered fully—may be regarded as the casualties of an advance guard in a perilous enterprise.

Illness did not hinder the progress of Mme. de Chantal's novitiate. She accepted it as an assault of Satan who had failed to shake her purpose by interior temptation, and when the appointed time was over she and her two companions made ready for profession. During that year they had been so closely in touch with the Founder of their Order that it might be truly said that he was their Novice-master, and it is clear that he had no doubt of their readiness for profession. The eve of that ceremony was marked by an incident, small in itself yet of singular interest to those who have knowledge of the realities of the Religious Life, which shows us Jeanne de Chantal, Mother and Foundress of the Visitation, in her position as a veritable novice, with the desire for choice of action still unconquered.

The craving for all that was beautiful and stately in the surroundings of their worship was intensified in the minds of the little Congregation by the sacrifice they had made of personal vanities, but, owing to their poverty, their chapel had remained bare of all ornament. On such a great occasion as a first profession the deficiencies they had deplored became intolerable, and Jacqueline Favre prevailed upon her father to promise the adornment that was so greatly needed for the altar. But President Favre, though he was generous, had so much important business at all times on his hands, that a lapse of memory was not astonishing, and the day approached without any sign of the fulfil-

ment of his promise. Now there were three gold pieces in the treasure-chest (which otherwise seems normally to have remained empty) and these François de Sales had charged his novices to hold in reserve for a case of illness. La Sœur Jacqueline was convinced that the money from her father was as surely theirs as if it had been already paid, and she and la Sœur Charlotte were extremely eager that the approaching ceremony should be celebrated with fitting dignity. La Mère de Chantal held authority, but it is possible that she regarded herself as responsible for the due impressiveness of the occasion in the eyes of those who were to look on and who aspired to follow in her footsteps. We do not know her motives, but she herself has left it upon record that she forgot the inward spirit in pursuit of an outward show of reverence and cast the claim of obedience to the winds. The treasury was emptied and the chapel beautified.

The year of her novitiate and all the discipline of the years that had preceded it had failed to defend her from surprise, but if resolution had collapsed easily her training reasserted itself in swift remorse. The same evening she sent a note to François de Sales avowing her offence. He came next morning, and she repeated her avowal on her knees. He did not regard it as a trifling matter. The Religious Life cannot exist without obedience, and she, with the standard of the nascent Order depending on her personal conduct, had sinned against obedience on the eve of her profession. "My daughter," he said, "this is the first time you have disobeyed me. I am so much troubled that I could not rest last night."

Her trouble exceeded his, however, and her first disobedience to him was also her last. If his reliance on her had been shaken momentarily it was speedily restored, and on the Feast of S. Claude, 1611, she took the vows of her profession.

Among the papers found after his death was her written

pledge under this date: "My Saviour and my God I surrender myself to Thy Holy Will and Divine Providence absolutely and unreservedly; direct me and put me to whatever purpose pleases Thee by the guidance of the spiritual father Thou hast given me, and grant me the grace of perfect love and obedience".

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST ASSAULT ON THE NEW ORDER.

It is natural to regard the final vows of a Religious as the consummation of her sacrifice, for in making them she makes irretrievable surrender of all the soft and pleasant things which human nature cherishes; and, from one aspect, there was something especially admirable and heroic in the sacrifice made by Mme. de Chantal. She was so eminently one who had great possessions, not only in the sense of worldly goods and honours, but in those intimate treasures that are more important to a woman's happiness, and she laid them down unflinchingly. Yet while we may join in reverencing that great act of hers before the altar of her humble little chapel, it is well also to recognise that in it she was fulfilling the hope and dream of many years. She herself indicates her own view of it when she refers to her first companions as "the sharers of her happiness". We have seen that in the years when she was free to choose and every honour and satisfaction were offered to her, her desire did not waver. She asked for freedom it is true, but it was freedom from those barriers of the world's customs which held her back in her ascent towards the delights she really coveted; it was freedom for heart and mind that she might give her whole being in the great venture of prayer. When she came to Annecy she escaped from the harassing pressure of a false atmosphere, and she was secure of the guidance and inspiration which had hitherto been hers only at long intervals. When the Convent doors closed on her for the first time they shut out much more of anguish than of joy,

and within them was the promise of a treasure as yet unrealised.

On the day of her profession it may have seemed to her and to François de Sales that the way lay plain before them. The Congregation had not been without fierce assailants in the first year of its existence, and its Founders were spared no species of calumny; but they were both indifferent to poisonous tongues, and the numbers of the little group increased steadily. Despite the burden of illness that was weighing on her, la Mère de Chantal looked forward to a clear and quiet prospect of months and years in which to nourish and build up the practices of prayer and service, in herself and in the others whom God might send to her. She believed that she had found her life-long home at Annecy, and that it was to be a place of peace. But if her path thenceforward had run smoothly and brought her gentle vision to accomplishment as she would have had it, the story of Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal and her experience of life would contain little that could inspire other souls to perseverance and to self-mastery.

It was little more than two months after her profession when the first disturbance came. President Frémyot, who was seventy-three years old, died at Dijon. His daughter was unprepared for the news. He had had a vigorous old age, and she was assailed by natural regret at having left him when he was in fact so near the end of life. But his death had been peaceful, and the calm of her true outlook soon returned to her. She could have brought her sorrow into the ordered routine of every day, of which prayer formed so large a part, if she had been completely free of the responsibilities of a former state. The cares of the world could not be evaded however. Not only was there property to be arranged in her children's interests, but there was also anxiety regarding the future of Celse-Bénigne. To the mind of her Director there was no question as to her duty, and at that time it was not his intention that the professed Sisters

of his Congregation should be enclosed. La Sœur de Brechard was given the charge of the little company of novices, and la Sœur Favre accompanied their Mother on her journey to Burgundy. She was absent four months, and before she returned had placed her boy at the College of Dijon and secured for him the guardianship of her uncle, brother of President Frémyot. This renewal of intercourse with the associates of a former time provoked an attack upon her which would have been spared to the member of a recognised Order, and sheds a new light on the precarious element in her position. The fact that she was able to resume her old direction of affairs, and treat with men of business suggested that her retirement was unstable and experimental, and it was impossible to imbue her critics with her own conviction that her self-dedication was too deep to be disturbed by temporary external circumstance. They averred that her father-in-law and her son had need of her, and the old contest was re-opened. So heavily was she pressed indeed that she wrote to Annecy to obtain support. The members of her husband's family seem to have gathered a species of council which included priests and Religious, and made a formal protest against her neglect of natural duties. One of them is reported to have been restrained from personal violence only by the extreme dignity of Mme. de Chantal's demeanour. Any suggestion that she was herself a Religious and that her vows were binding was repudiated. She could lay claim to simple vows only, and in their eyes occupied the same position as a member of the Third Order of S. Francis.

Her letter was written under the pressure of her acute distress, but François de Sales replies with characteristic calm. Concerning her father-in-law's claim: "I tell you frankly that I say still what I have always said: if his personal need is so great that your presence is required to tend him you should remain. If it is only a question of a better arranging of affairs it is not required of you. Never-

theless, if there is very great need of you which can be supplied only by yourself and no other you are free to extend your absence for that purpose. I leave this to your judgment, but I do not disguise that I think the question contains a certain measure of temptation. Because it is quite clear that if you had made a second marriage with some gentleman of Gascony or Brittany you would have relinquished all this business and no one would have questioned it. That which you have done does not involve nearly so complete a withdrawal, and you have reserved the right to watch over your children and their affairs. But because your measure of withdrawal is for the service of God there are people who try to make out that it is wrong and a desertion of duty."[1]

The effect upon la Mère de Chantal of this conflict with the world and the world's opinion was to deepen her sense of vocation. On Christmas Eve she reached Annecy once again, having made the journey on horseback, and resumed her government of *la Maison de la Galerie*. The beginning of the new year was intended to be an important epoch in the history of the Congregation. It was the time when the Sisters were to go out into the poorer streets of Annecy to tend the sick. For novices the cloister was maintained, and the professed went on their errands in pairs and with their faces hidden by veils. It does not seem that their experiences provided any grave objection to their practices, and they were made welcome by the poor of Annecy and applauded by the richer class. At this time the little company appears to have been extremely happy and their Superior, recognising that a blessing rested on them, prayed eagerly that they might treasure and maintain a hidden life, for she was persuaded, even in those early days, that the spirit of the Visitation must depend on their withdrawal from public knowledge and popularity. Possibly if their external activities had been continued, the ardour of good

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xv., Lett. 725.

works might have swept them into contact with the world. For women who were by birth entitled to command money and influence, the barrier would have been difficult to uphold, but, in those first days of limited endeavour, the life that was divided between deeds of charity and prayer satisfied those who were allowed to share in it. Only the severe attacks of illness suffered by la Mère de Chantal shadowed the progress of the Visitation, but these were more than once so serious that her life was endangered. The well-wishers and also the critics of the venture were persuaded that it must collapse in the event of her death; and François de Sales himself, though he retained the calm taught by the practice of prayer, did not disguise that her recovery was all-important. "In this undertaking you are the courage of my heart and the heart of my courage,"[1] so he wrote to her. She did not regain any stability of health till she had moved away from *la Maison de la Galerie*. But the removal of the Community was not due to the unhealthiness of their abode, it was made necessary by the increase of their numbers, and advisable by the inconvenience of visiting the poor in the town from a distant suburb. In October, 1612, a little procession, led by their Confessor, M. Michel Favre, passed out from their first home, and made their way "to the house that touched the City wall near the market and by the quay"[2] which was to be the second nursery of the Visitation.

Here la Mère de Chantal, released from bodily infirmity, had scope for her spiritual vigour, and her strong presence drew other souls to her. There was an element of danger, indeed, in her attractive power which was recognised by her Director and met by unflinching insistence on the real purpose of the Congregation. He told her to address her novices before the clothing of a new aspirant that they might understand the sole sufficient reason of their coming.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xv., Lett. 677.

[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 794, see note.

She was to tell them they had come to school to learn how to bear the Cross of Our Lord by denial of themselves, surrender of their wishes, mortification of all desires; that they would have la Sœur de Brechard as their Mistress, and must obey her and follow her directions with the humility, sincerity, and simplicity which Our Lord required of all who entered the Congregation; that they were mightily mistaken if they thought that the reason of their coming was to get greater peace than was to be had in the world. They would find instead that the one object was to uproot all evil desires, to correct every fault, and to learn to live righteously.[1]

The Founders were never tempted to make entrance easy that numbers might increase. The standard they imposed was high, and admittedly there were women truly desirous of the Religious Life who could not face the practice of humility required of a Novice of the Visitation.[2] But they were justified by results. It was the original band, schooled in the Parent House at Annecy, who bore the spirit of the Visitation from end to end of France.

Once more, just when she was gaining hold over the work to which she had been called, la Mère de Chantal was forced by her duty to her family to lay it down. The old man, whose declining years had been so ill-spent, died at Montelon in June, 1613, and his three grandchildren inherited his property. There was no question as to the necessity of their mother travelling again to Burgundy to represent them, and Celse-Bénigne, now the head of the family, came from Dijon to escort her on her journey. He was to be the guest of the Bishop, and the bantering note that announces his arrival shows a gayer aspect of the intimacy that was ordinarily so solemn.

"I want if possible to be the first to tell you that this beloved Celse-Bénigne has come, my daughter. He came

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xv., Lett. 747.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 805.

very late last night, and we had the utmost difficulty in restraining him from rushing off to see you in bed where assuredly you would have been.

"How deeply I regret that I shall not be there to see the embrace that he receives from a mother who has no longer any sense of natural affection! They will of course be thoroughly mortified caresses! Ah no, my dear daughter, don't be too hard on him! Show just a little pleasure at his coming, our poor Celse-Bénigne! We must not be too vigorous all at once in slaying all our natural love.

"If I can I shall come and see you myself, but with diffidence. One hardly dares to show oneself beside such a charming being." [1]

The brilliant figure of Celse-Bénigne that flashes here and there across the record of his mother's life is never more charmingly depicted. He inherited from her his ardent temperament and warm affections, and at that moment he was a source of delight rather than of anxiety. He and Bernard de Thorens went with her to Montelon, and the pilgrimage made in their company cannot have been completely uncongenial. She seems to have set them a fine example in business dealing. M. de Thorens watched with admiration as she summoned the tenants before her, sitting in the great hall at Montelon, and examined the accounts of the estate. She found the disorder she knew to be inevitable, and she seems to have endeavoured to administer justice as well as charity. The worthless woman who had made her life a misery did not pay the penalty she merited, however, in spite of the demands of abstract justice, for her offence had been so personal that generosity towards her was a necessary part of the sacred profession of her former victim.

So diligent and so expeditious was la Mère de Chantal that she was absent from Annecy only six weeks, and the episode would have little importance if it had not implied

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvi., Lett. 895.

the final severance of those outward ties which until then were always liable to interrupt her life as a Religious. And it is clear that all interruptions were really unwelcome. The life she had chosen with all that surrounded it was infinitely dear to her. We find her writing to la Sœur de Brechard in terms that give a clear picture of her mind.

"You move me deeply when you write of seeing me again in our poor little refuge at Annecy. To me it is a place of rest and sweetness because—and I do not fear to say this to you—I find there that which I treasure most, the source of all my spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ, in the person of our honoured Lord and Father." [1]

She did not disguise her dependence on François de Sales or her delight in association with him. She regarded the opportunity for intercourse given her by residence at Annecy as a blessing bestowed on her by God. It was a sacred gift to be enjoyed to the utmost, but to be accepted in fear and trembling as imposing of itself a claim for worthiness. Compared to it the charm of that summer journey into Burgundy had no value, and she checked herself in her motherly pride and pleasure in the companionship of the two lads who loved her, Thorens and Celse-Bénigne. Under their escort she came riding back to Annecy with all possible speed, through summer sultriness that involved her in a severe attack of fever after her arrival.

Her presence was urgently needed. There was much business to be transacted before that period of peace—which always seemed in sight and yet continually receded—could be attained. The Congregation had proved its right to existence sufficiently to justify the building of a real Monastery. The Duchess of Mantua, daughter of the Duke of Savoy, had consented to be Patroness, and her brother, the Duke of Nemours, had given a site on the borders of the lake and adjoining the house the Sisters were occupy-

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 20.

ing. The first stone was laid on September 18, 1614, and at the beginning of the following year the chapel was ready for use. But the Founders had had to face many difficulties and the most violent forms of opposition. For some reason, which is now obscure, a number of persons in Annecy desired to prevent the establishment of the Congregation and went so far as to raise a riot and pull down the building in its first stages. Thus for the time being la Mère de Chantal was denied the peace that her quiet haven should have secured for her, and had in addition the regret of knowing that the affairs of the Congregation were checking François de Sales in his literary labours.[1]

Nevertheless there was no uncertainty as to the welfare of the Visitation. At the time of the consecration of their chapel, the numbers had risen to twenty-six, of whom eight were novices; and because the knowledge of them was spreading beyond the limits of Savoy or of Burgundy, la Mère de Chantal was not allowed to take quiet possession of her new domain, and give herself to the training of her family and the tending of the poor of Annecy. Indeed the future was to contain but little quiet.

The first step towards the immense change that lay ahead was in no way portentous. In January, 1613, the Bishop of Geneva received a visit from a monk who wished to consult him on spiritual matters, and also to bring a message from a certain Elizabeth des Gouffiers, a member of a degenerate Religious Order, who was inspired by his writings to seek his guidance. François de Sales was impressed by the account of her and also by the letter she had written to him.[2] And shortly after he came into touch with another woman, the widow of M. d'Auxerre, a gentleman of Lyons, who also had been so affected by his writings that she desired his direction. The idea of the Visitation appealed to them both and a common desire resulted in a meeting between

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 10, 11, 12.

[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xv., Lett. 850.

them. Two relatives of Mme. d'Auxerre were infected by their enthusiasm, and the party obtained leave from François de Sales to make a pilgrimage to Annecy. It was understood that each one of the four had leanings towards the Religious Life, and both Mme. des Gouffiers and Mme. d'Auxerre were strongly predisposed towards the Visitation as being the true expression of the spirit of its Founder.

In May, 1613, they all arrived in Annecy, and were warmly received first by Mme. de Chantal and afterwards by the Bishop.[1] They gave the impression of complete sincerity and were admitted freely to the Convent. There seems to have been no cloud upon the visit, and the travellers had sufficient knowledge to appreciate the reality of devotion that inspired the new Order. They remained nearly a fortnight and returned to Lyons with deep regret, leaving one of their number, Mme. des Gouffiers, as a tentative member of the novitiate.

Up to that time it had been necessary for every aspirant to come to Annecy, and no other course had occurred to the minds of the Founders as being open to any who felt a vocation to their Order. But Mme. d'Auxerre had family ties which kept her permanently in Lyons, and yet her whole heart responded to the Visitation and she could not rest without some prospect of a part in it. From her ardour sprang the first idea of transplanting an offshoot from quiet little Annecy to the great commercial city of Lyons. At first, though she made no secret of her wish, François de Sales does not seem to have realised its far-reaching importance. In November, 1613, in a letter to Mme. de la Flechere, he makes casual mention of the Constitutions of the Visitation having been sent to Lyons where there is a scheme of beginning another house.[2] Apparently he imagined that a written scheme would be enough, and that local talent would suffice to work out the result desired. In the event the

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvi., Lett. 880.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 927.

House at Lyons drew its chief support from Annecy, and an immense upheaval of the life and practice of the Order resulted from the interposition of Denis-Simon de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons.

The story is a memorable one, and bears witness to the astonishing stability of a Congregation founded so modestly and seemingly so experimental in its constitution. The admiration with which la Mère de Chantal had inspired Mme. d'Auxerre bore fruit in practical activity. A house was taken in the Rue des Griffons in Lyons and arranged in imitation of the Convent at Annecy. Mme. d'Auxerre's enthusiasm was so convincing that she was able to obtain money from her friends, and the Archbishop himself joined a subscription to his formal approval of her project. She was wise as well as fervent, and she realised that the spirit which prevailed at Annecy would not spring of itself in new soil. Therefore she applied to la Mère de Chantal to undertake the implanting of it. The reply she received indicates the warmth of their mutual regard.

"My very Dear and Honoured Sister,

"May the peace of Our Lord be in your heart. It is His Will to grant the fulfilment of your desire. He alone prompted it, and He alone, also, has led us all into absolute agreement in giving what you ask. Our little Company have made Communion and prayed a great deal with this intention and are rejoicing in the thought of it. For my own part I may tell you—in the close intimacy of our souls—that when I brought this matter before Our Lord it seemed as if His Divine Goodness showed me that He Himself had guided you with His Own Hand, and this gave me great happiness and confirmed me in giving you the help He asks of me. How fortunate you are to be summoned by God to so fine a work. Be strong in courage that you may be able to respond to such great favour." [1]

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 13.

In the mind of la Mère de Chantal the importance of this first emigration was very clear; perhaps she would have chosen to remain at Annecy unmolested, but she and the Sisters had made the enterprise the subject of their prayers, and a conviction prevailed among them that it was the Will of God that it should come to pass. They waited therefore in readiness for the formal summons to those who were to go to Lyons.

But they waited in vain. The next news that reached them was completely unexpected. The three original Foundresses of the new Convent had been assigned a director, M. Lourdelot, from the diocese of Langres, and had added to their number. The fresh element proved disturbing. Veneration for the life they had seen at Annecy still dominated the thoughts of Mme. d'Auxerre and the companions of her pilgrimage, but the new-comers were loth to admit that the inhabitants of a distant city in Savoy could have anything to teach the enlightened citizens of Lyons. They maintained that if François de Sales and Mme. de Chantal could originate a Congregation dedicated to the service of God, so also could Archbishop Denis and Mme. d'Auxerre. M. Lourdelot identified himself with this idea and it became a Cause. He had influence with civic and ecclesiastical authorities, and the loyal trio, who never wavered from their first desire, were swept away by the tide of general opinion. In due course tidings arrived at Annecy of a new Order of the Presentation founded at Lyons with great solemnity and pomp amidst a vast concourse of the citizens. The Superior was Mme. d'Auxerre.

There is no indication that the composure of la Mère de Chantal or the Bishop of Geneva was in the least disturbed by these events. If the Visitation was to be rooted and founded in humility it could not suffer by contumely which its Founders knew was not merited, and it was impossible for either of them to doubt that its future destiny was ruled in every detail by the Will of God. If it was not needed

at Lyons they were content to be limited to Annecy. But the new Order, though it borrowed largely from the Visitation, failed altogether to achieve the disciplined calm which reigned in the Convent by the Lake. M. Lourdelot had stirred up interest and enlisted influence, and those who gave him their support desired to have a share in the direction of the enterprise that they had helped to launch. In striking contrast to the hidden life of *la Maison de la Galerie* the house in the Rue des Griffons became a centre of intrigues and squabbles. Mme. d'Auxerre, the nominal Superior, had no authority. Her purpose was unwaveringly spiritual, but she was powerless in the midst of the conditions of which her docile temperament had made her the victim. She was haunted always by recollections of the life at Annecy as she had known it, and by a vision of la Mère de Chantal which showed her by light of contrast the complete inadequacy of her own ill-fated attempts at government.

Eventually the turmoil in the Rue des Griffons became so unmeasured that by general consent the little gathering of women separated and retired to their respective homes. At this point Mme. des Gouffiers, on a journey whose object was the settlement of her own affairs preparatory to her profession, passed through Lyons and found Mme. d'Auxerre deserted by her Congregation and a prey to violent remorse and disillusionment. Mme. des Gouffiers was fresh from Annecy and still in the first fervour of her enthusiasm for the Visitation. Her own intentions and interests were flung to the winds, and her whole being was concentrated on remedying the deplorable situation of her friend, and rearranging every one's affairs in such a manner as would most redound to the honour of her beloved Community. She wrote to her Superior and to the Bishop of Geneva, and she reproached and expostulated and persuaded wherever she had opportunity among the people of Lyons. The interest kindled by the new foundation had not died away,

and those who had been most instrumental in bringing it to disaster seem to have been persons whose motives were belied by their headstrong and ill-considered methods. Both M. Lourdelot and the Archbishop were induced to write to Annecy, and popular opinion became as pronounced in favour of inviting guides from the Visitation as formerly it had been of independence. The doings at Lyons evoked neither resentment nor elation at Annecy, but perhaps they afforded an exercise in the virtue of indifference, and the two Founders having been spectators of the strange travesty of their own effort that had taken place, responded ungrudgingly to the renewed appeal for assistance.

In January, 1615, la Mère de Chantal, accompanied by Jacqueline Favre and Marie Aimée de Blonay, left Annecy for Lyons. The record of the previous months had shown her the infinite importance of this step, and she approached it with awe rather than excitement, lamenting the distance that must divide her from the advice and support of François de Sales, when so many new questions would require solution. At each of the seven halting places on the journey la Sœur de Blonay was instructed to give her a little note of encouragement.

"Let us go, my very dear daughter, with one heart and mind where God calls us; though our ways be different they will not divide us, for it is for the same reason and with the same goal that we pursue them.[1]

"As every stage takes you further away, my daughter, you must gather courage and rejoice that you are doing Our Lord's pleasure. You have the same reason for joy as those in Paradise.[2]

"Oh, Lord Jesus, save and bless and strengthen and confirm this soul, and because by Thy inspiration she is dedicated and consecrated in The Sacred Name, let her be filled with Thee as with the balm of Divine Charity."[3]

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvi., Lett. 1037.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1038. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 1042.

Such were the suggestions that he made ready for her, in case the end of each long day's journey might find her so weary in body that her heart might be failing her. There was good reason to shrink from the prospect that lay before her. The justification and the strength of the Visitation were purely spiritual, but those who were to receive it were known to her only by the rumours of their self-assertiveness and their dissensions, and she was required to stand alone among them and to present the treasure that was a joint possession in such wise that all would hold it sacred. But the isolation was only nominal. He who had shared in that joint discovery shared also in every stage of subsequent anxiety. It was this that he wished her to understand as each day's journey widened the space that separated them.

In time to come la Mère de Chantal was to face missions of greater difficulty, and to face them without that warm shelter of sympathy to which she could always turn during that first independent venture. But the power that the future was to claim of her had not yet ripened, and her work at Lyons rested on the inspiration and encouragement that came to her from Annecy.

"The distance between heaven and earth is not great enough to divide hearts which Our Lord unites—how often have I told you so, my mother?"[1]

So he assures her when she laments over the months that pass without intercourse; and, when she grows anxious because decisions must be made before his advice can be obtained, he reminds her that she "need never fear to answer for him, for the result would be the same if he had answered for himself. In thought and wish and in all else she is the same as himself. She knows all he can do, all he would like to do, and all he hopes to do."[2] Confidence, with all it means of strengthening support, can hardly be

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvi., Lett. 1073.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1065.

extended further, and plainly he was using the language of literal truth and not of compliment. It should be recognised therefore that, while la Mère de Chantal did great and lasting work when she founded in Lyons the first Branch-House of the Visitation, the accomplishing of it at that period is not evidence that she was approaching the spiritual maturity that—reached by a way of sorrows—was hers at a later time.

The external history of her experience at Lyons may be given briefly. In Mme. d'Auxerre, the deposed Superior, she found—instead of the animosity of a defeated rival—the loyalty of a humble follower. The three original Foundresses, true to their first allegiance, entered the novitiate. La Mère de Chantal and the Sisters from Annecy made a profound impression on all who had the privilege of personal touch with them, and it seemed that the transplanting of the Visitation was to take place without further hindrance. But Monseigneur de Marquemont was one of those persons who introduce the element of the unforeseen wherever they have any connection. The Rule and the purpose of the Visitation as it had been transmitted to him by François de Sales was brief and simple, and he had approved the coming of the Order. But when the Sisters were fairly established he raised vigorous objection to the visiting of the poor which was an essential part of their life at that time. His dealings with the Bishop of Geneva and with la Mère de Chantal were conducted on the friendliest terms. François de Sales came to Lyons to confer with him, and when after nine months the House at Annecy had regained the presence of its Superior, he paid a return visit and expressed unbounded admiration for all he saw of the Order in its first home.[1] But it may be that he was not exempt from the spirit which had maintained that Lyons must be able to improve on anything originated by Annecy, and he justified his eagerness for innovation by the argument that customs that might

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 38.

bear good fruit in the little town by the lake-side were not profitable in a great commercial centre. Anything established by his authority must reflect dignity on himself and on the city, and the unconventionality of François de Sales did not satisfy him. He required that the Congregation with its simple vows and flexible conditions should become a Religious Order formally constituted with the approval of the Pope, that its members should be enclosed, and a rigid rule replace the experimental methods of its Founders. On one point at least reason and experience were on his side. He represented—and he seems to have done so with irreproachable deference to the high standing of la Mère de Chantal—that the freedom which permitted a Religious to return to her own province and conduct difficult business negotiations, was quite certain to result eventually in grave abuse, an individual exception was no defence of so great a risk.

Once launched on a course of questioning and correction he was difficult to check, and in relation to him the two Founders were by no means one in judgment. François de Sales was easily moved by a challenge of his own decisions. He was responsible for the foundation scheme of the Visitation, and when Monseigneur de Marquemont indicated his supposed errors his humility predisposed him to agree. La Mère de Chantal, on the other hand, had a vivid recollection of the confusion that resulted when the Archbishop inaugurated a Religious Congregation on his own account in his city of Lyons, and was animated by a very human spirit of indignation as she watched the progress of his interference. There was hardly a detail for which he had not a suggested alteration. He even went so far as to press the changing of their name. It was the duty of the Superior to avoid any protestations that would disturb the peace, and the position gave her opportunity for a fine exercise in patience ; but she was not, fortunately, without a sense of humour, and when la Mère Favre (who held authority at Lyons) wrote in

despair of the Archbishop's constant visiting and criticism, she was enabled to suggest a seemly and non-committal course of conduct.

"When the good Archbishop talks to you about our enclosure or any other essential point in our Rules, give him no reply at all except by your mild and undisturbed composure, with just a little laugh of gentle merriment.[1] If it is necessary to say something let it be only the hope that he and Monseigneur will come to an understanding, because so far as we are concerned we are, under obedience, devoted to our Order. There is nothing which is not comprised in that answer. Would that God of His Goodness would restore him to the same mind that he was in when he was here."[2]

It is open to question whether the Archbishop's hunger to impose his own ideas on the Visitation was likely to be appeased by "a little laugh of gentle merriment" as response to his suggestions, but, as la Mère de Chantal was well aware, the real issues lay outside the sphere of any member of the Order, and her own resentment may have found some small relief in writing her instructions. She attempted also to goad the gentle nature of François de Sales into opposition. A note from her to him has in it the characteristic fire which flashes here and there from the pages of her published Letters.

"I have just been told that a messenger starts for Lyons to-morrow morning. If you possibly can I do urge you to write to Monseigneur and really to write distinctly! It seems to me that these questions are of such immense importance to this House that they are worthy of a little serious consideration. My own dear father will say that I am always so violent! Indeed I am so—and in this matter would be so to some purpose if only violence did any good!"[3]

If François de Sales, in whose hands the matter rested,

[1] "Un petit rire doucement joyeux."

[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 49. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 68.

had been violent also, the destiny of the Visitation would certainly have been very different. He was dealing with a man whose many admirable qualities were overshadowed by self-confidence and obstinacy, and it required gentleness that was more than human to avoid quarrelling with him. Some points that were insisted on seem to have entailed the destruction of the deepest hopes for the Visitation that its Founder had cherished. But de Marquemont's insistence was at the point of the bayonet. He had got the Institute and the Sisters who upheld it from Annecy, but he announced that, if compliance with his wishes was refused, it would be at the price of complete and final severance between the two branches. Probably la Mère de Chantal at that stage would have chosen independence, but the aim of François de Sales was set too high for his individual wishes to influence him. Peace was preserved, and he applied himself to drawing up the final Constitutions of the Order, which was to be placed under the Augustinian Rule.

The life-story of Jeanne de Chantal depends for true comprehension on realisation of the personality of François de Sales, and this last, for the English mind, presents grave difficulties. To the vivacity of the Savoyard was added an exuberance of sentiment individual to himself. His was a nature with which Northern reserve has nothing in common and, considered superficially, there were elements in it which are unattractive to English instincts. But he acquired (he tells us himself that it was not a natural gift) an entire sincerity which is above rivalry. To it was due the supreme development of his influence on Jeanne de Chantal, and without recognition of it there can be no rightful understanding of his own career. It is ordinarily unsound to judge a character by personal conduct in a single episode, and it is only as an example of what is self-evident elsewhere that we dwell on the attitude of François de Sales towards the attacks of de Marquemont. We find

the man himself in his letters to la Mère Favre in the moment of crisis, and we are the better able to grasp what was meant by "the Spirit of the Visitation".

He had just received and considered the programme of alterations sent him by the Archbishop. It would have been enough to dispatch a brief note of his intentions to the Superior at Lyons, but instead he explains the position to her.

"It has been my view," he writes, "that we should do better as a simple Congregation and that the bond of charity and holy fear was sufficient enclosure, in addition to the retirement which common sense prescribes and which the Rule provides for. But because the welcome that may be accorded to our Congregation all over France may depend on the attitude of Monseigneur towards it, I agree that it should be made into a Religious Order. He says the Rule is excellent and the fruits of our Congregation are admirable, but that the root of it is worthless.

"The important point is that I have been able to acquiesce with entire readiness, and not only my will but also my judgment submits easily to that of this great man. For indeed, my daughter, what other object have I in it all, save the glory of God, and that His Love should be sown more abundantly in the hearts of all those who are so fortunate as to be altogether dedicated to God? I should like to say a great deal more so that you would be better able to understand these matters when Monseigneur talks to you. But it is really enough that you should assure him that he will not find me combative nor overbearing. I should be but a pitiful creature, should I not, if I esteemed myself and my own judgment in comparison with others?"[1]

And a little later in that same month of February, 1616, when the Archbishop's attacks were becoming more and more serious, and the devastating suggestion of altering the name of the Visitation was wringing the hearts of its first

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., Lett. 1162.

members, François de Sales writes again from Annecy to his "very dear daughter," at Lyons.

"If Monseigneur should say to you what he has written to me, you must tell him that you have been left where you are to use all your humble capacities for the establishing of your Congregation; that you try to guide the Sisters according to the Rules of the Congregation; that if in spite of that it pleases God that this Congregation should be changed in name and purpose and condition, you yield yourself to His good pleasure to which the whole Congregation is dedicated absolutely; and that whatever may be the method by which God is served by the Company to which you are joined at the present moment, you are equally content.

"Truly, my very dear daughter, that is the spirit we must have in our Congregation, for it is the spirit of perfection. If it should be made useful in establishing other Congregations of faithful servants of God, and fail ever to establish itself, it will be only the more pleasing to God because it will be less liable to self-esteem. You know, my dear daughter, how dearly I love our poor little Congregation, but it is without the anxiety that, ordinarily, is inseparable from such love; mine is not ordinary, and is completely exempt from anxiety, for it rests in my complete confidence in the protection of Our Lord, and in the sense that His Hand can do more for this poor little Foundation than the mind of man can conceive."[1]

Here we have the practice that accords with an exalted standard. As bit by bit the cherished vision of his "poor little Foundation" was obliterated by the self-assertions of another mind, François de Sales took firmer hold upon the root idea that prompted it—that of a life completely dedicated. What matter if his daughters might not fulfil his dream of serving Our Lord in the persons of His poor? The form of service mattered little so long as the self-

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., 1168.

dedication was unwavering, for its Founder offered it to God, and offered with it his own will concerning it. The historic sacrifice of his namesake of Assisi was hardly greater than that which he accepted when he submitted the sacred project of so many years to the ruthless hands of his brother of Lyons. Yet, though he stipulated only for one point and yielded ungrudgingly in all else, in the end he saved the essentials of his first ideal. Not only did the Constitutions admit the weak and aged to his Order, but the spirit of hiddenness, and of a certain liberty which de Marquemont would fain have stifled, survived, and the Visitation continued to reflect the nature of its Founder.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FAILURES OF THE MOTHER SUPERIOR.

It is quite evident that when Mme. de Chantal renounced the riches and pleasures of the world she did not escape its difficulties. When she looked forward to the Religious Life in the midst of the worries and petty persecutions of Montelon, or the more subtle distractions of Dijon society, it presented a prospect of peace which was never fulfilled even in the first days at Annecy. In one of her Exhortations to the Sisters she gave in her own quaint language, a summary of what the externals of life in Religion offered, and this no doubt was true as concerned the individual members of the Community. "We are so well supplied as regards both the spiritual and the temporal," she said, "that humanly we have great advantages. Half the world goes hungry, and we have all we can need although we have no superfluities. We can go quietly to the refectory and receive what is intended for us as from the hand of God in silence; we eat as obedience orders without having a husband in a temper to throw the dishes hither and thither, without having to endure the disputes and ill-humour of a step-mother or of sisters, or any of the thousand other possibilities which you can picture better than I can suggest. We have the opportunity of silence that we may draw near to God, which no one can interfere with, and in addition Religion gives us plenty of time for prayer and Office, for self-examination and private spiritual reading. We do not need to mingle with a crowd to receive the Blessed Sacrament, nor to wait two hours before a Confessional and then go away in despair as

sometimes one has seen other women doing. But we are provided with a good and wise Confessor who suits his time to ours, and takes more pains than can be told for the service of the monastery. You see, my dear Sisters, all these blessings should be weighed in the scales of the Sanctuary and should inspire us to humble ourselves continually before God." [1]

The picture may have borne some resemblance to her own imaginings of the future when she was still in the world, though it was drawn nearly thirty years later, and it corresponded to the experience of her listeners. There were nuns within the Cloisters of the Visitation who had almost literally fought their way there, and who did find the opportunity to give themselves to a life of prayer without distraction that they had expected. But we shall see that the vocation of Mme. de Chantal was to learn to live the life of prayer in the midst of distractions. They differed in character from those that had assailed her in the world, but, humanly, were not less of a hindrance to recollectedness; it was the difference in herself after her choice that made them innocuous.

If it be permissible to generalise regarding the mind of the French people as a whole, it may be said to possess an understanding of the possibilities of the devotional life which is a contradiction of its other attributes. Again and again there have been national developments which furnish proof of this, and none are more notable than the various religious movements and reactions of the seventeenth century. But the foundation and growth of the Visitation should not be regarded as merely one expression of a wave of religious thought. Its inception was independent of the various efforts and aspirations that were actually contemporary with it. François de Sales and Mme. de Chantal were both isolated personalities; of both of them it is true to say that at the time when the new Congregation came into being they

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. ii., Exhortation 6.

owed little to the influences that were dominant elsewhere. Paris was the centre from which the leaders of new thought and activity were able gradually to permeate the kingdom, but François de Sales, the Savoyard, embarked on his unassuming experiment at Annecy and showed no desire for connection with the French capital. And there is no reason to believe that the impression made in its earlier years by the spirit of the Visitation was part of a general movement. The signs of rapid growth in the new Community were prior to the religious revival that was recognised all through France, and it is possible that it might have thriven no less vigorously in after years if it had continued to stand alone. The spirit of the Visitation cannot be understood unless it is regarded in its peculiar individuality. When the existence of the Congregation became known it conveyed an invitation rather than a protest; in spite of its hidden spiritual austerity it set its doors wider open than was the case with any other contemplative Order, and the entrance of the aged and the weak modified the completeness of its separation from the Religious life of ordinary experience.

Whenever, as the years passed, it was established in a provincial town, its establishment argued that the need of it had been of gradual growth. Its appeal was to the devout, and there was nothing sensational to be drawn from the most intimate knowledge of its customs. The knowledge of it and the desire for it spread through France with unexpected rapidity; but it was not borne upon its way on the wings of religious excitement. Springing up as it did in the little sequestered town of Annecy, it was far more in its element when engaged in quickening the stagnant life of small communities than when it was required to compete with the conflicting interests of great centres.

Yet, as we have seen, it was at Lyons that the first offshoot from the parent tree was planted, and the first chapter of the public history of the Visitation opened. And in the smaller places that followed the example of the great com-

mercial city, a new Foundation almost invariably entailed a long train of anxieties and disputes, less crucial but not less trying to those concerned, than the vagaries of Monseigneur de Marquemont. An invitation to the Community was only the barest preliminary to a new Foundation. Over and over again, when all necessary arrangements seemed to be concluded, a cloud of gossip and intrigue rose up as the exhalation of all the pettiness and self-seeking of that particular locality, and threatened to obscure the true purpose of those who had desired the coming of the Sisters by arousing the worst elements of party struggle. At such times the Superior from whose family the pioneers of the new establishment were taken, required to exercise both tact and tolerance. The ignoble jealousies of the pious and the avarice of the worldly were stirred into active life by the tidings of their coming, and the Sisters were sometimes made the victims of a bitter opposition that was really the fruit of long-standing local feuds. At such times of stress the Community incurred obligation to those who were staunch in their support, and these benefactors were not tardy in exacting what they regarded as their due. If a new Order repelled the good opinion of the general public, it placed obstacles in the way of its own usefulness; yet the terms on which friendliness could be retained must have been often a severe tax on such a nature as that of Mme. de Chantal, and the demands made on her were often irritating and occasionally absurd.

In the very beginning there was a notable instance of this at Lyons. A certain M. Austrain, a citizen who was held in great respect, had given loyal and kindly help to the Community in moments of great difficulty. Mme. de Chantal was deeply grateful to him and, with the penetration which had been so useful to the Sisters, he discovered the fullest use that could be made of her gratitude. He had an only child, Christine, and ostensibly his desire that she should benefit by the influence of the Sisters of the Visita-

tion was natural and laudable; a convent education was held desirable for all who could afford it, and the fact that the new Order did not undertake the training of the young as an ordinary duty secured all the more individual attention for Christine. Mme. de Chantal complied with a wish that she regarded as legitimate when she undertook to keep the child for a long visit. Probably she expected to sow the seed of a future vocation to Religion by displaying before eyes that were just opening upon life the happiness of her little company at Annecy; certainly she had no idea of the burden that was being imposed upon her. Her letters to the Superior at Lyons tell the story; the first announces their safe return.

"I do not know if I shall have time to write to M. Austrain, in any case be careful to give him my compliments. The child is certainly very lucky; three of us take special care of her. She promises to be charming, but M. and Mme. Austrain will need always to insist on obedience and make her respect them. I love her dearly, and so do all the Sisters. Impress upon them how anxious I am to be of use to them in this matter."[1]

Clearly the nuns were well disposed to welcome the child and to make her happy, but each individual of that first company at Annecy was imbued with the high ideals that inspired the Founders; they had ceased to recognise ordinary values; their outlook was one of continual aspiration, and their idea even of the pleasures suited to childhood was probably of the exalted type suited to the atmosphere they breathed. Even if their charge was an ordinary child it is not astonishing if she was oppressed by the manifestation of a fervour which she was not able to understand. Françoise de Chantal, who had had a like experience, was extremely troublesome at some stages of her career, and she had the companionship of a sister but little older than herself, and many diversions and indulgences which would not

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 43.

fall to the lot of other Convent *pensionnaires*. It would have been easy to forecast the difficulties of a solitary child in the Convent at Annecy unless she possessed the abnormal vocation of which there were occasional instances. It is possible that Christine Austrain was abnormal in another direction and was known to be so by her parents, but it is more likely that she had been mismanaged in infancy, and the natural tendency to disobedience and general naughtiness that was in her when she was entrusted to Mme. de Chantal, assumed unnatural proportions in unconscious protest against the holiness of her surroundings. Reports of her must have gone regularly to her father, but she does not appear again in the correspondence with the Superior at Lyons for more than a year. The allusion then is brief and suggestive: "I am not able to write to M. Austrain, but give him what advice you judge best; this little girl of his is a dreadful child".[1]

Ten days later comes another report which is less restrained: "The child's inclinations become daily more impossible to check. It is really appalling to hear the things she says, my daughter de Thorens is completely astonished. She says she cannot live here any longer, that no one talks of anything but God, and she gets so tired of it that sometimes she feels completely desperate. I have had to beat her myself to-day and shall have to do so again; we must just do the best we can while she remains here. We hope that they will soon send to fetch her away, but we must not urge it because M. Austrain is so kind that we regret deeply that we have not been able to help him more."[2]

Among the first little group of Sisters was Peronne Marie de Châtel, afterwards distinguished as a wise and capable Superior at Grenoble and elsewhere. The disturbance caused by this small alien became so great that Sister Peronne Marie was required to devote herself completely to the care of her, "so that she may be strictly looked after;

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 81. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 83.

if after that she does not improve there can be no further peace unless we send her away. I have so much affection for Monsieur and his wife that I am very sorry not to be able to extend it to their child. I cannot write to him, but I want you to give him my compliments and assure him that we do not give up all hope about his daughter. Sister Peronne Marie's influence may be of use to her. We need much prayer for this difficulty of ours." [1]

It speaks well for the tolerance of the Community that a year later the child is still with them, but the situation does not seem to have altered, and the letters to Lyons show that patience is once more strained to its limits. M. Austrain must be urged to send for her. There is no need for so many plans about it, a man on horseback can easily take her in front of him. "She dreads returning to her father seeing that he does not want to have her. She begs that he will send her to Neuville. A lady from there has been here and, ever since, that is where she has wished to be sent. Help us to get rid of her, I beg, but it must be done carefully." [2]

At this point M. Austrain died and the child had to be kept on, but she was given a new guardian, Sister Marie Adrienne Fichet, who was probably less gentle and more of a disciplinarian than Sister Peronne Marie. At Easter, 1618, when she had been nearly three years at Annecy, Christine is reported as "doing a little better, Sister Marie Adrienne has a very tight hold on her".[3]

In compassion for her unprotected state Mme. de Chantal might perhaps have allowed her to remain on indefinitely but for one of those acts of impulsive kindliness on the part of François de Sales which from time to time involved the Community in unforeseen difficulties. Mme. de Chantal had determined, in the light of experience, that the Houses of the Order should have no inmates too young to be

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 84.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 107. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 121.

testing their vocation. This rule was modified later, but with the vision of Christine Austrain before her, she was fully convinced that it was necessary for the maintenance of that calm which is essential to the Religious. François de Sales, however, pledged himself, in response to a friend's petition,[1] that a girl of thirteen should be admitted to the Convent at Annecy, and, we may suppose for the benefit of this newcomer who was not to be exposed to evil influence, the offending Christine was at length returned to her home at Lyons.

It is clear that the wilfulness of this turbulent child was a real disturbance to the peace of the nuns at Annecy, but the picture conjured up by those brief references from the pen of the Superior is calculated to awake commiseration for the culprit. It is so evident that all who surrounded her were intent upon altering her without, as a preliminary, attempting to understand her. Almost from the first she appears as a small wild creature at bay, encircled by all sorts of privileges and possibilities, which she had no power to appreciate, but for which she was expected to maintain herself in a disposition of constant gratitude. The episode, a distressing one for all concerned, is representative of a problem that should not have been ignored by a mind so clear and so courageous as that of Mme. de Chantal.

In fact, although we may accept in theory that no one may be a subject of both Kingdoms, that no one may serve two masters, we are so reconciled to compromise that those who choose the Kingdom of Heaven and its Master openly, as must the true Religious or the faithful priest, are liable to excite antagonism not only towards themselves but towards the principle of righteousness they represent. The disastrous effect upon certain natures of contact with honest piety is patent to all observers, and, though it must not be deduced that piety should cloke itself, a problem arises which cannot be completely solved by advancing the

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1331.

doctrine of original sin. Christine Austrain was the worse for association with the nuns at Annecy, her whole nature revolted against demands she was incapable of satisfying, and all that was evil in her came uppermost. Yet in her case, and in the innumerable other cases of like causes and effects, the fault is not on one side only. All those who have heard the Call of God must recognise the mystery of the Gift of Grace (in whatever terms they may express it), and yet, in dealing with individuals who have not received it, they seem frequently to be oblivious of the advantage that accrues to them from the keenness of their spiritual sense, and make claims on others which are entirely unfair. In the rapid spread of the new Order, for instance, it happened again and again that a novice was received in defiance of the wishes of her family, and no question was raised by her Superiors as to the rightness of her defiance. The point of view of the world was condemned without a hearing by those whose supernatural vocation drew them away from it, but it is at least open to argument that a greater effort after comprehension might have softened the acrimony of some of the conflicts that raged round the Convents of the Visitation in provincial towns. It may be easy to demonstrate to the satisfaction of religious minds that the world's standards are completely false, but the fact that they exist remains, and that they are, moreover, the only standards of which large numbers of individuals have any knowledge. Mme. de Chantal had lived in the world, and should have recognised the necessity of tolerance in those who professed to be followers of Christ; but at first her own emancipation from the chain of worldly conditions seems to have disturbed her balance; it is only after the first period of her life in Religion was over that she rose to her true position as peace-maker and ruler. It was the misfortune of Christine Austrain that her connection with the Visitation and its first Superior belonged to this first period.

There are others who emerge with contumely from the pages of the Correspondence who might also have fared better at a later time. In the fervour of her own conviction Mme. de Chantal was impatient of the self-assertion and the half-heartedness of others. It was a privilege to be allowed to aid the Visitation in its growth, a privilege which she appreciated with all the vigour of her ardent nature, and she could not brook either wavering or presumption in those who pretended to a share in it. Charity exacted from her the outward form of tolerance, but her self-restraint in speech or writing was sometimes only a thin veil to her resentment, and there were occasions on which she stood aside and watched, in wondering resignation, when it seems that the exercise of her personal influence might have tamed mistaken zeal or stimulated flagging energy.

In the crowd of individuals, moreover, with whom her varied experience brought her into contact, there are a few who stand out as personalities and who made as well as received impression from their mutual intercourse. La Mère de Chantal was undoubtedly a ruling spirit, but there were some in whom natural decisiveness was accentuated by conflict with her, and it was from these as much as from her acknowledged teachers that she learnt the lessons that perfected her later life. Mme. des Gouffiers has a special celebrity in the annals of the Visitation, and made her mark not only on the development of the Community but also on the character of its Superior. She brought Mme. d'Auxerre to Annecy on that memorable voyage of discovery in 1614, and she was instrumental in recalling the errant intentions of the Foundresses at Lyons to their first allegiance, and appeared there as a veritable Angel of Deliverance. Even among its original members there can have been few who were so enthralled by admiration of the Visitation; its ideals appeared to Mme. des Gouffiers as the fulfilment of longings, too intangible to be given form, that had

always haunted her, and with the fervour of the enthusiast she set herself the task of extending its capacity of influence by every means available.

Yet it was to Mme. des Gouffiers that la Mère de Chantal owed her first personal experience of that element of the incalculable which is to be found so often in the conduct of the most devout. The Foundress was herself of single purpose, straight and uncomplicated in nature to a degree that is rare among women, and it was her natural instinct to give to others the trust which she herself deserved. Mme. des Gouffiers came to her as an eager learner and she came with a legitimate claim for sympathy. In her girlhood she had been forced into the Convent of the Paraclete at Nogent sur Seine;[1] her vows debarred her from return to normal life, but the customs of her Order offered her none of the solace of a life of devotion. The nuns of the Paraclete, who had as Abbess that noble lady Mme. Marie de la Rochefoucault, had each a separate establishment; they had free intercourse with the outside world; they travelled at will, and accepted very few of the limitations of the Religious. They professed to owe obedience to no ecclesiastical authority lower than the Pope, and by avoidance of flagrant scandal pursued their easy course unmolested. But Elizabeth des Gouffiers never reconciled herself to her part with them; she was equally dissatisfied with her spiritual and her temporal position, and no light dawned on her till the "Introduction à la Vie Devôte" fell into her hands. From that moment a craving for strictness in Religion, combined with wondering reverence for François de Sales, absorbed her mind, and there could be no better credentials for approach to la Mère de Chantal. She was perfectly sincere in the fervour of her admiration for all she saw and heard, and when her friends returned to Lyons and left her in the Novitiate of the Visitation she regarded herself as highly favoured. All her hopes

[1] The Foundation dated from 1123, the first Abbess being the celebrated Heloise.

centred on obtaining freedom from the Order into which she had been forced, that she might enter the one to which she believed she had been drawn miraculously, and the Bishop of Geneva employed all the interest he could command at Rome to aid her in her endeavour. Her enthusiasm for the Congregation was hardly greater than that with which she was received by its Founders. There is no trace of the least misgiving as to her stability in the generous welcome that they gave her. A story has survived that François de Sales approached one of her friends to discover her private comments on the small customs that were in force in the first Convent of the Visitation, and heard that she objected to the use of wooden spoons and complained that the food was insufficiently sweetened. Such criticisms might easily have occurred to one who approached the Visitation fresh from the luxuries of the Paraclete, although their expression is hardly consistent with extreme religious fervour; it is said that in consequence of them leave was granted for the use of silver spoons, but no alteration was made in kitchen methods.

The golden period in the life of Elizabeth des Gouffiers was undoubtedly the year she spent in the Novitiate at Annecy. She was imbued with the admiration for la Mère de Chantal which was as the very atmosphere of the Convent, and the self-assertion of her native character was in abeyance. In her new surroundings there was no one with any previous knowledge of her, and as she completely deceived herself as to the permanence of her new impressions, it is not surprising if she deceived others also. But the journey that was intended to end her business with the Monastery in Champagne marked instead the end of her true participation in the aims of la Mère de Chantal and in the spirit of the Visitation. She entered upon the scene at Lyons at the moment when chaos appeared to be complete and immediately assumed a leading part. She played it with phenomenal success and obtained the results she aimed

at, but her delight in her accomplishment upset her balance. It is clear that her letters to Annecy betrayed her. She was, plainly, spending herself in the service of the Visitation, but one response to her from François de Sales indicates the impression she had made upon him.

"If you are made use of by the Providence of God, my very dear Daughter, you must be absolutely humble about it. Your rejoicings must be at His Great Goodness. He has made it clear to you, as you will remember, by the blessing He has given to your attempts to humble and abase yourself, that He wishes you to be vile and abject in your own eyes. If you are keeping to these lines you need have no anxiety as to the rightness of what you do because God will be your Guide." [1]

But her experiences at Lyons did not dispose Mme. des Gouffiers to rule herself on the lines suggested. Separated from her Superior the effect of her months at Annecy evaporated swiftly. Her idea of her vocation to the hidden life that was growing within the Convent walls by the lake-side had depended on the personal influence of the two Founders; apart from them she saw herself in a different aspect. She continued to admire their Institution with all the vigour of her tempestuous nature, but she seems to have imagined a vocation for herself as herald and protector of it, and to have discarded all attempts at personal conformity with its spirit.

Her position was anomalous; it was only because the Constitutions of the Order were not yet fixed or approved that it was possible. Nominally she was a novice of the House at Annecy, but until she was regularly freed from her vows in the Order of the Paraclete her obedience in the Visitation was merely voluntary. To some natures this would have been an inducement to additional loyalty, but Elizabeth des Gouffiers required a more tangible chain. In fact she was never freed from the Paraclete, although

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvi., Lett. 1004.

François de Sales seemed to be absolutely confident that the Papal dispensation could be obtained, and it is not improbable that her own desire for the success of the petition to Rome faded away when she realised that freedom would mean her immediate retirement to Annecy, with no further scope for her spirit of enterprise.

At first la Mère de Chantal was disposed to be very indulgent towards her, even when she began to suspect her of imprudence she declared that she could not thwart the ardour of "a daughter who is as a part of ourselves":[1] but the restless energy with which she made unnecessary journeys and asserted herself in the developments at Lyons, after her own real utility in them was past, made her Superior more and more uneasy. In January, 1616, she was encouraged to resume her interrupted journey into Champagne, to make the final settlement of her affairs at the Monastery of the Paraclete, and then to return to Annecy to await the sanction of her action that was expected from Rome. She carried out only the first part of the programme; perhaps she intended to fulfil it altogether and was checked only by circumstances, but more than a year of notable activities already separated her from her brief experience as a Religious, and it is not easy to picture her as being again content with a hidden life.

Her return journey was stopped at Moulins by the inclemency of the weather. The ensuing events are, psychologically, of the utmost interest. It should be remembered that in the mind of François de Sales and of others who loved and watched over the Visitation, la Mère de Chantal was regarded as the mainspring of its influence and of its strength. She was animated by an immense enthusiasm, but it never carried her into action that her judgment disapproved. She was, therefore, a rare leader, and those who worked with her recognised her position as a fact above dispute. To one who had been a novice at Annecy

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 75.

her authority should have had peculiar impressiveness, and no reminders of it can have been considered necessary. Elizabeth des Gouffiers, however, held other views and regarded them as consistent with warm allegiance to the Visitation. Finding herself delayed at Moulins she employed her time in singing the praises of the new Congregation. She seems to have held gatherings of ladies somewhat similar to a modern drawing-room meeting, and told them of her experience at Annecy, and the beauty of the life inspired by François de Sales. Evidently she possessed powers of persuasion and a gift of public speaking which had remained undiscovered until her enterprise at Lyons, and now she convinced the ladies of Moulins that they would confer the greatest benefit conceivable upon their native city by the establishment of the Visitation within its walls. In March, 1616, she was able to write to Annecy conveying their invitation to the Congregation to establish itself among them.

La Mère de Chantal had not yet recovered from the physical effect of the arduous months she had spent at Lyons, and she was still torn with anxiety over the proceedings of Monseigneur de Marquemont; her ruling desire at that moment was for a period of peace in which to consolidate the work at Annecy, and to ensure that each one of her daughters was so imbued with the spirit of the Order that she could be trusted to represent it wherever she was sent. The suggestions of the enterprising pioneer at Moulins were therefore as unwelcome as they were unexpected. Her first impulse was to refuse absolutely, but she had already learnt to deny impulse, and, while declaring that there were for the time being no Sisters who could be spared to a new Foundation, she permitted a hope that at some future time Moulins might share the privilege already bestowed on Lyons. As an afterthought she forwarded a copy of the Rule, reflecting perhaps that the Visitation

ought not to be interpreted solely by Mme. des Gouffiers in a place where it might eventually be planted.'

Two letters were needed to bring matters to this point, and when the second had been despatched la Mère de Chantal appears to have dismissed the question of Moulins from her mind. In that year, 1616, there was much to occupy her in her own inward history and in the events that concerned her Order, and between April and June Mme. des Gouffiers was not even a subject of anxiety; she was supposed to be busy arranging those complicated affairs of hers which might easily have taken her to Paris. Then a rumour reached Annecy that she was still at Moulins, and still very busy with her project for the new Foundation. La Mère de Chantal, more than ever convinced of the inappropriateness of new ventures when the Constitutions of the Order were in the melting pot, displayed some irritation. "I am indeed amazed at ma Sœur des Gouffiers," she wrote. "She is merely wasting her time."

She cannot be accused of any lack of foresight because she failed to prevent what actually occurred. As Superior and part Founder of a new Order she regarded its extension as dependent on her approval and authority, but, as we have already suggested, the views of la Sœur des Gouffiers differed essentially from hers. Four months of hard work had brought the self-appointed pioneer of the Visitation to the goal of her desires; she had employed family influence, she had won the sympathies of the devout feminine element, she had enlisted both the Capuchins and the Jesuits in Moulins in support of her cause, and finally had obtained financial credit which enabled her to choose and furnish a house which she considered suitable. Then on June 25, 1616, a solemn procession wound through the streets of Moulins, and with all ecclesiastical and civic pomp the new Foundation of the Visitation received the episcopal blessing from a delegate of the Archbishop of Lyons.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 58.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

la Mère de Chantal would come in person to inaugurate the life of the new Convent; when she found it was to be governed by la Sœur de Bréchard her consternation was great. The Sisters, torn from the beloved surroundings of Annecy, found no welcome awaiting them. The name of the First Superior of the Visitation had been freely used by Mme. des Gouffiers who intended to excite high expectation of her coming and to make it as sensational as possible; but the quiet unassuming little company that represented her aroused no enthusiasm, and the support that had been promised faded away. Further, the self-appointed foundress paid no deference to la Mère de Bréchard and usurped all authority or importance that the position afforded. "She was generally regarded as Mother-Superior," wrote one of the nuns from Annecy, "and it was months before our Mother, Jeanne Charlotte, had a chance of seeing anyone in the town."[1]

"The nature of ma Sœur des Gouffiers is a dreadful one,"[2] wrote la Mère de Chantal to Lyons in September. She suffered in every thought of Moulins. Letters were slow in coming, and when they came the record was of difficulties in business matters, of lack of necessaries, and of the constant torment of the Sisters by their supporter and protectress. It became an important object to persuade Mme. des Gouffiers to come to Annecy, but with the intention of relieving Moulins rather than from any idea of controlling her elsewhere.[3] From time to time exhortations were addressed to la Mère de Bréchard to maintain peaceful terms,[4] but the character of their benefactress made peace a forlorn hope. As time passed, in spite of all drawbacks, the spirit of the Visitation asserted itself in Moulins and its work became a reality, but the spirit of Mme. des Gouffiers had ceased to have anything in common with that of the Visita-

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., Lett. 1242, *note.*
[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 81.
[3] *Ibid.* Lett. 112.
[4] *Ibid.* Lett. 94, 102, etc.

tion. It was not until October, 1617, that endurance failed, and with the sanction of her Superiors at Annecy la Mère de Bréchard suggested to her difficult guest to seek scope for her abilities elsewhere.

Mme. des Gouffiers moved on to Paris. She ignored the Monastery of the Paraclete, but she was not legally released from it, and it had ceased to be imaginable that she would complete her novitiate at Annecy. Such a position would not appear to be nourishing to self-esteem, but there are no tokens that her confidence in the integrity of her own motives and her own conduct ever wavered for an instant. She was in her own opinion the divinely appointed benefactress of the Visitation, endowed with vision for its truest interests denied to others, and when Moulins and all she had accomplished there was left behind she busied herself in preparing the ground for another venture in Paris.

"You can see for yourself," François de Sales had written to her, "whether it is wise to extend further, when we have so few Sisters capable of being Superiors."[1] But he wrote gently and she needed firmness. If at that time he could have put aside his sense of her good intentions and of the gratitude the Congregation owed to her and used the severity he had at his command he might have revealed her to herself. After her first enthusiasm for the whole idea and system of the Visitation had passed, she would no longer submit to any authority from la Mère de Chantal; she posed, in Paris as in Moulins, as her admiring and devoted daughter, but she was capable of turning on her with angry and abusive demands for money. In 1620 la Mère de Chantal writes despairingly: "She is treating me with rudeness; God in His wisdom knows why such things are allowed".[2]

A little earlier in that year François de Sales had made a vigorous appeal to her, she being in Paris and he at

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., Lett. 1280 (Feb. 1617).
[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 285.

Annecy. She had involved herself in lawsuits with her own relations and made herself conspicuous by her wilfulness and violence; and this although once she had been a novice of the Visitation, breathing the atmosphere that pervaded the Convent by the lake and understanding all that it might mean as a summons to high aspiration. It was no wonder that he felt some sort of protest necessary even at that eleventh hour: "What has become of that charming disposition which you displayed to me when you were here, my dear daughter; is it never going to return? Truly when I consider how completely it has vanished I am in great distress." There is a characteristic fatherliness about the letter; it is remonstrance rather than reproach, but he shows her plainly that she is no longer fit for the Religious Life. His summing up of her character is interesting. "With those splendid qualities which I know that by nature you possess, are combined so strong a grip on worldliness and the pride of life, such restlessness, such subtlety of mind, that I have infinite misgivings at the thought of your living in the world! Nothing can be more dangerous for such a life than this mingling of good and evil, and when we add to it your unconquerable dislike to any sort of submission there is nothing more to be said except that—at any cost—you must retire from the world."[1]

To him the middle course did not present great difficulty. She was to use the Houses of the Visitation for the deepening of her devotional life, and establish herself within convenient distance of one of them; she was to eschew the excitement of her legal proceedings and content herself with such means as she possessed. The advice is wise and gently given, but the stage at which its recipient might have profited by it had long been left behind. Her intercourse with the Visitation endured, albeit stormily, a little longer, but in February of the following year a letter to

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1663.

Lyons from la Mère de Chantal in Paris closes with these words: "Did I never tell you that notre Sœur des Gouffiers had no more to do with us".[1]

It is idle to speculate on the extravagant adventures in devotion and philanthropy which the years might have held for Elizabeth des Gouffiers. Whatever her faults she gave herself completely to any movement that claimed her sympathies. The ladies of Paris, inspired by Vincent de Paul, were visiting the prisons in 1621, and Mme. des Gouffiers was among them. While thus employed she caught an infectious fever and died after three weeks of suffering.

"Her death goes to my heart," wrote la Mère de Chantal, "but it teaches me to try and do my duty better towards God."[2] If she herself had failed in her duty towards God in relation to "notre Sœur des Gouffiers," we cannot now measure the degree of failure, but it is possible—considering the great qualities of mind and spirit with which she was endowed and the many advantages assured to her in her life at Annecy—that she might have been at greater pains to win back her difficult novice when she first began to offend, and that she was too ready to despair of her. If, for instance, she had gone herself to Moulins before the evils there were beyond remedy she might have re-established her ascendancy over that errant nature. However this may be, there is no doubt that Elizabeth des Gouffiers was instrumental in teaching a valuable lesson to the Founders of the Visitation, for she demonstrated before them the ease with which a vocation, however vigorous in its beginning, may be missed and wasted.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 311. [2] *Ibid.* 361.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT RENUNCIATION.

THUS far we have followed events that came in natural sequence when Mme. de Chantal renounced the world. The new Congregation struck root deeply and grew rapidly; she had infinite reason for thankfulness, and it seems clear that the years preceding her retirement to Annecy contained far heavier trial and sacrifice than the first stages of her life as a Religious. She had bodily weakness and many forms of human opposition to contend with in those early years, but she had not expected an easy lot, and the unity of purpose that existed between her and her leader would have carried her through tribulations of far greater severity. A woman of her ardent temperament can welcome the obstacles to be faced and overcome in a cause that has claimed her entire allegiance, and at that time she had not begun to feel the real burden of responsibility; in every case of difficulty the final decision rested with François de Sales.

If we are content with the chronological order of events it would be possible to regard this period of content as lasting until the death of S. François in 1622, but to do so is to miss the key to the real life of Ste. Chantal. The spiritual nature of the relationship between the two which had begun at Dijon in 1604 was not dislocated by their external activities and their frequent consultations over the affairs of the Congregation. The work they shared was not of a kind to impede their spiritual growth, nor did it lessen his sense of responsibility towards her in that office of Director which he had exercised so long. In the close

intimacy of their life at Annecy François de Sales gained deeper knowledge of the soul that it was his part to guide, and could estimate more truly its quality and possibilities. He had the gift of intuition as well as vast experience, and was well aware that Mme. de Chantal was dependent upon him for the glowing happiness of the first period at Annecy. We have seen how fully he examined the question of their relations while she was still in the world, and the convincing sincerity of his belief that their intimacy was in accordance with the Will of God. All subsequent developments served to confirm that belief, indeed the spiritual force of the Congregation which was their joint endeavour was signal proof of its secure foundation. The life of the Congregation was never more completely pure and devotional than in its earliest days at Annecy, but a Community cannot remain stationary. However beautiful may be the stage to which it has arrived, an advance is necessary, and the advance is ordinarily not self-chosen. The same is true of the life of the soul. There is extraordinary beauty in the interior life of Mme. de Chantal at the first stage of her great venture, but she could not rest there. Had she been in other hands it is likely that she would have been submitted to some violent ordeal, whose self-evident effect would have made a visible land-mark in her life; but she was with François de Sales, and he never wavered from the principle of all his teaching, "tout par amour, rien par force".

In the inmost consciousness of the Director there grew the knowledge that his charge was able to ascend to an atmosphere far higher than that which she was content to breathe. She was obedient; any suggestion of his was received with unquestioning submission however great the deprivation it involved. But he saw that that which lay before her was not to be communicated by his lips, that the time when she might rest in personal obedience had reached its term.

It was Whitsuntide of the year 1616. Mme. de Chantal was to go into Retreat as she had done many times before. In all her Retreats she had followed the guidance of François de Sales, and when she entered upon this one she had no foreboding of what lay before her. The record of it is in her own words as she wrote to him from day to day,[1] but it demands serious effort to follow within view of her real experience. That which we witness is not a new phase of spiritual excitement or a rhapsody of unhealthy exaltation. These two persons were of balanced mind, wise in their dealing with others, far-seeing in practical affairs. It was their habit to listen for the Voice of God; they believed that It had spoken to them ten years earlier and blessed the union of soul that had been so fruitful and so happy; that It had directed them continually since then and their mistakes were due to their infidelity. Already the mental attitude of listening, only to be acquired by the gradual discipline of the will, was strongly developed in them both, but there was nothing strained in it. That which reached them would not have been audible if their hearing had been dulled by the clamouring chatter of the world, but they had not withdrawn into permanent silence; they were both in constant intercourse with the many who claimed their help, and their only mark of difference from the mass of believers was their independence of accepted standards and their vivid faith in the Divine Direction of their lives.

The inner meaning of Retreat is the resignation of the whole being that it may be conformed to the Will of God. With that intention Mme. de Chantal entered on her time of silence in the Convent at Annecy that Whitsuntide of 1616. But François de Sales was ill, and at the end of four days, when the time assigned to her was nearly at an end, she acknowledged that her thoughts had been distracted by

[1] Their correspondence during this Retreat is given in full, "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., Lett. 1202 to 1206 and Appendix D.

anxiety and that the time had all been wasted. The note that tells him this does not disguise her incapacity to face the future if his illness had proved fatal. Now when she was entering Retreat his charge to her had been given in these words: "Our Lord loves you, my dear Mother, and desires that you should be altogether His, having no support other than His Arms. Your eyes must not wander elsewhere, nor your spirit find any rest except in Him. Let your will be simply His so that nothing can come between; put away all else, allow yourself no fancies. As you have surrendered everything to Him there is nothing to distract your thoughts." She failed altogether to put these directions into practice, but the days she had wasted had been passed in a species of retreat by her Director also and for him illness had not checked its fruitfulness. He was the better able to help her to begin again.

"I am very willing that you should continue your attempt to denude yourself of all things," he wrote to her. "Give utterance sometimes to such ejaculatory prayers as this: 'Lord, I am ready, drag from me all my heart clings to; No, Lord, I withhold nothing, tear me from myself! Ah, Self, I throw thee off for ever!' Do this quietly, but with reality. Moreover, my very dear Mother, you must not any longer cling to human support; you must resign all you have had hitherto, and cast yourself weak and desolate before God's Mercy-seat, remaining there stripped of everything and without a claim on any human sympathy in thought or act. And further, you must remain indifferent as to what He may grant you in the future without speculating whether it is to be from me that you draw what you require. Unless you do this you will never rise out of yourself, you will always be bargaining and that above all else is what you must avoid."

We have no record of any communication from him to her which is more deeply characteristic of their true

relationship. It shows us all his tender comprehension of her and the unflinching purpose beneath his tenderness. She had capacity to grasp and use all that he gave her to its fullest, and her next report breathes a different spirit from the first. "I feel my soul is freed and it has an indescribable delight in the sense that it is wholly in the Hands of God. In all else, truly, I have nothing but dismay, but if, as I intend, I follow your instructions, my Father, by God's help I shall advance.

"It seems to me now that I must not regard or desire anything but as Our Lord directs. This is what my superior will teaches me, and I am endeavouring completely to ignore my natural will.

"May God of His gracious mercy strengthen us both, and help us to the perfect accomplishment of what He desires of us, my very dear Father. May Jesus sanctify you wholly—as I believe He is doing."

Before those words were written Mme. de Chantal had realised that she had embarked on an adventure different from any she had known. Probably she realised that it was to bring her to an isolation that was a completely new experience, and yet, by a curious paradox, it is clear that she was not to be alone in it. The time indeed had come when the close partnership of fruitful labour must be broken, and the two who had rejoiced in it while it was given them, were to share in offering the sacrifice of spiritual separation. The great call revealed itself to her suddenly and it claimed all her courage, but the same knowledge had come to him slowly. He had vanquished all suggestion of shrinking long before the decisive moment arrived, and was ready to be the leader in their mutual response.

"Those who were present at the end of the Transfiguration," he reminds her, "no longer beheld either Moses or Elias, but Jesus Christ alone."

She learnt that his time of withdrawal was to be ex-

tended, and congratulated him as her own drew towards its close. Her words have deep significance.

"I rejoice that you prolong your time of solitude as you can still devote it to the needs of your soul. I say *your*. I may say *our* no longer, for I feel I have no more share in it, so completely am I now deprived and shorn of everything I treasured most.

"How deep the knife has gone, my Father! Shall I be able to continue as I am now? May God uphold my resolutions as I am beseeching Him. Such strong support came from the words you wrote me! What comfort it is that you should say you are helped and strengthened by the knowledge that I am surrendering altogether before God! Ah, Jesus, grant us both the continuance of this consolation!

"I am full of hope and courage, and at peace. I thank God that I can turn away completely from all I am renouncing. It seems that it is already a long way off, but sometimes a thought of it possesses me and for an instant I look backward. May He Whose Hand deprives me be for ever blessed! May His loving-kindness uphold me in conforming to His Will. I was happy in the suggestion Our Lord gave me—as I wrote to you on Tuesday—that I was to yield to Him completely. I little thought that He would begin by requiring me to renounce my very self, demanding that I should suffer by my own hands. May His Will be ever blessed, and may He strengthen me!

"I have not told you that I have but little inward light or comfort. I have only a sort of peace, for Our Lord seems during these last days to have withdrawn that touch of sweetness which suggests the sense of His Presence. To-day also there seems nowhere for my soul to rest. It may be that Our Lord intends to lay His Hand on every part of my heart that He may take all and leave me nothing. His Will be done! It came back to my remembrance to-day that once when you told me I must surrender I answered that I had nothing left. And you said: 'Have I not warned

you, my Daughter, that I shall deprive you of everything?' It is easy enough to give up outward things, but to give up one's skin and bone, to go down to the very marrow which it seems to me is what we have done, that is a tremendous thing, so hard as to be impossible without the grace of God. To Him alone be the glory both now and for ever.

"Without your leave I shall not seek for the happiness of intercourse with you, my Father. It seems to me that I must not do anything, nor have any thought or will or desire unless it is given me. I conclude with a thousand greetings to you, and with this last thought that has come to me. It seems as if I saw our souls united in entire resignation before God."

That is the last outpouring. Her entire resignation before God is not a phrase; she did in fact resign the source of all her happiness in life. Acts of theoretical surrender are inseparable from the making of a good Retreat, but how many are ready to sever themselves from their dearest treasure simply because it is too precious? Mme. de Chantal faced the present and the future, not unflinchingly, but with the knowledge that her strength was inadequate to the demand they were making, and that courage and determination must come to her from God. In laying down desire it was necessary that all self-reliance should be laid down also. The message of that Retreat was a contradiction of all that was natural and normal. Humanly there was no reason that she should push away the support and inspiration of her life and labour, but once again the supernatural cut across the lines of her destiny that had seemed so clear and so direct. To respond she needed supernatural grace—and she received it.

François de Sales replied to her final letter. He had foreseen the uprooting of their mutual happiness, and it is plain that he never doubted her purpose or capacity to meet the summons when it reached her. His calm acceptance of that revelation of self-conquest is characteristic: "It is all

as it should be, my dear Mother," he wrote, "you must remain naked until it is God's good pleasure again to clothe you. Tarry ye here, as Our Lord said to His Apostles, until you are reclothed with power from on high. Remain in absolute solitude until Mass is over to-morrow. Declare to-night that you renounce all personal merit, desiring nothing but what God gives nor even desiring ever to acquire any save as He may be pleased to use you.

"Our Lord loves you, my Mother; He requires that you should be His completely, that you should have no arms to support you but His only, that you should find no rest save in Him only. Your eyes must not wander from Him, your mind must be centred on Him alone. You must bring your will into such quiet unity with His that there is no division. Put away all thought of the friendship and understanding between us which was God's gift; put away all thought of your children, of your own soul and spirit, of all things whatsoever. You have surrendered all to God. Fix yourself wholly on Our Lord in His Crucifixion, adore Him in His suffering. Whatever you are doing should be done because God wills it, not because you wish it.

"I am doing well, I thank God, and there has sprung up in the depths of my heart a new consciousness of power to serve God better all the rest of my life."

It is a strange farewell. There must be no regret because it would blemish the offering, and François de Sales was able to exult because of the new consciousness of power that sacrifice had brought. The sacrifice itself, moreover, was a hidden thing. For a time they both remained at Annecy and external conditions did not alter. But that which is visible is of minor importance in such a life as that of Jeanne de Chantal. She had rejoiced freely in the happiness of a close spiritual friendship, receiving it as God's gift to her. In renouncing it she accepted that pain must take the place of joy, and, if in dark moments any sense of the old sweetness should return, it must be quenched promptly and rigorously.

In the years since she came to Annecy until then, her spiritual life and her labour for the community had been one undivided whole, shared in each shade and detail with the Founder of her Order. But from this time she enters on another phase. She may well have foreseen from the moment when the Call of God first came to her, that the path she was to tread required courage. Perhaps at times she had an intuition that her vocation would not be fulfilled without the touch of a real agony. And the intervening years of happiness had contained much discipline, they had given her strength.

She made her great resolve to put away delight and went forward firmly. She realised that her offering was not completed, even when its necessity had been faced and accepted, and she did not know what vistas of sacrifice the future held, but there was no reserve in her surrender. Sometimes we shall find her troubled with apprehensions of being dragged back into the hubbub of the world as the Community made more and more demands upon her. But in fact her service to it was given from a higher plane than hitherto, for she was on her way to that Union which is unattainable without an entire offering of the will, and, once having turned towards it definitely, she was set apart, and safe from injury by the world's distractions.

CHAPTER X.

THE VISITATION IN PARIS.

1619 to 1622.

With the succession of new Foundations a new era dawned for the Congregation, and the hope that her life was to be one of retirement and prayer faded for ever from the mind of la Mère de Chantal. At a later time when the range of influence the Visitation had secured had widened, the opening of new Houses did not necessitate a personal claim on the Superior at Annecy, but experience at Moulins showed very plainly that in those early stages her presence was of infinite importance to the future status of the venture.

The Founders were in fact swept by circumstances out of the course they would have chosen. We shall find as the years passed that counsels springing from Annecy were always in favour of a very slow advance. The ideal Foundation was not a mushroom growth of which the seed had been sown by evanescent religious excitement and a love of novelty; it was rather the fruit of careful planting and assiduous cultivation. At Annecy itself in its early days each individual vocation had been inspired by personal touch with S. François, and was deepened gradually by intercourse with the first Superior. The process involved a searching test which only the resolution of the elect could survive, and it followed that the original Sisters of Annecy, when years of experience and discipline had mellowed them, were fitted to carry the spirit of the Visitation to cities and townships from end to end of France. But at first they

were not ready for their task, and the first years were precarious. Lyons had had its own inception, peculiar to itself; Moulins was wholly erratic, and served as a warning not as an example; the principles of healthy and legitimate growth were not demonstrated by either, but they remained in clear outline in the mind of the Founder and, if longer life had been permitted to him, he might have ordered the spread of the Visitation in accordance with his ideals. At Grenoble he fulfilled the design that was seldom carried out elsewhere.

We have seen the importance of the custom, in those places where devout inhabitants were numerous, of inviting a preacher for the whole season of Lent or Advent who would devote himself altogether to the instruction and exhortation of the Community entrusted to him. In the letters of François de Sales there are numerous references to the selection most edifying for Annecy, and to his own visits to other cities. In the Lent of 1617 and the following year he was at Grenoble.

Very soon after his first arrival he writes of the suggestion of a Foundation there,[1] of the enthusiasm with which he was received, and of the responsiveness of his hearers. Indeed their response was so inspiring that his eloquence and persuasiveness reached their purest heights at Grenoble, and it is not surprising that shadowy vocations sprang into vivid being among his listeners, and that by March the leading ladies of the town had passed from tentative suggestion to a vigorous demand for a House of his Order. "The Bishop and the Magistrates make no objections and I show no eagerness," he says, "although in actual truth I do wish for this House, because I hope it would be to the glory of God. I see all the right conditions for establishing it; nevertheless I have not as yet an inward sense that the time has come for it."[2]

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., Lett. 1279.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1288.

He came away without having committed himself, but the general impression he had made was as great as on his celebrated visit to Dijon. The many he had touched did not know how to reconcile themselves to his going. To him these tributes were an occasion for sincere and humble thankfulness, but la Mère de Chantal viewed them somewhat differently. A letter from her to la Mère Favre gives an interesting side-light on the life of the times and on the methods of François de Sales himself. These last, it is evident, brought her, when she allowed her mind to dwell on the condition of his health, to the very boundary of despair. Apparently she had yielded to that weakness on the day in April, 1617, that she wrote to la Mère Favre.

"Grenoble has meant a great increase (of labour) because of the innumerable letters that he writes and receives from there. If only these ladies would have a little consideration and would not go to him nor write to him except when real spiritual need required it. He has enough to do without them. I have heard that you are likely to see some of them. Do, I beseech you, see if you can discreetly defend him from what is unnecessary, by their means. You know his extraordinary kindness and that he will allow nothing to go unanswered. Nevertheless it is said that unless he lessens the quantity of writing he is doing now his health will be severely injured and his life shortened. This is a thing which every one ought to regard as serious, and he should not be used except for the glory of God and real usefulness. I am going to write to Dijon, to Chamberi, and everywhere else I can that he may not be required to write except when it is useful and necessary—when it is so there is no prevention or avoidance possible." [1]

The claims of Grenoble were not to be evaded, however, though they were postponed because that year of 1617 was one of tragedy to both the Founders of the Visitation; it was marked by the death of Bernard de Thorens, followed

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 100.

some months later by that of his young wife Marie Aimée. In the autumn dangerous illness attacked la Mère de Chantal, but when Advent came François de Sales returned to Grenoble, and the project of the new Foundation grew definite. It is evidence of his prudence that he arranged for some of the aspirants to take the journey to Annecy and begin their novitiate there. This was not a popular measure, because many of the benefactors of a new monastery were actuated by the wish to keep the daughter who was to be dedicated to Religion in their own neighbourhood, but it was one that promised well for the House at Grenoble, and when, in April, the time was ripe for la Mère de Chantal to complete what he had been preparing, the Visitation was established in its new home without any of the miseries of petty opposition, or the wearying anxieties of extreme poverty to which it was exposed on so many other occasions.

After six weeks La Mère de Chantal was able to return to Annecy encouraged by an experience that promised so well for the future. Suggestions for new Foundations reached the Bishop of Geneva from all directions; there began to be a talk of the need of one in Paris, and it was clear that their great venture was fulfilling a high purpose. We have seen that—in the years since her first arrival in *la Maison de la Galerie*—la Mère de Chantal had been through a gradual process of interior discipline, and had reached a condition of detachment that had not been foreshadowed by the intentions with which she had renounced the world. As she journeyed back from Grenoble to the Convent by the lake she could look onwards to the likelihood of many similar expeditions, demanding infinite wisdom and self-repression, certainly, but promising the fruitfulness she most desired. Her life, as it then appeared, was to be one of service with a leader in whom she had implicit confidence; her personal demands upon him were to be reduced to the smallest dimensions possible, but the

work she might be permitted to accomplish would be part of the work they shared. She intended in all honesty to make absolute surrender of her will, and check all personal wishes in accordance with her resolution in Retreat, yet it is possible that, if at that moment the real future had unveiled itself before her, even her brave spirit might have quailed. For in fact there remained to her only a week or two of the life at Annecy that was so dear and so congenial. She returned there the end of April; in June she set out for Bourges by way of Moulins and Lyons and her absence lasted nearly four years. Although she did not know it when she started, she was "to launch out into the deep," to go through many new experiences and finally to face the sharpest agony that her human life held for her before she came again to the quiet Convent that was home. And thereafter home was to become headquarters, and her external career was that of a commander whose charge requires ceaseless watchfulness; it was for her to inspire others when the voice that had been her own force and inspiration was silenced.

The call to Bourges, that followed that of Grenoble, came from Archbishop André Frémyot, one of those interestingly contradictory personalities of which we find many instances among high-placed ecclesiastics of the period. His character in its later developments was affected by the fact that he was the brother of la Mère de Chantal, but his early friendship with François de Sales does not seem to have disturbed its bias towards very definite worldliness. Life opened for him under bad auspices, his career being decided by motives of interest and his archbishopric bestowed on him as a reward for his father's services to the Catholic cause before he had been ordained priest. These circumstances must be remembered in relation to his sister's attitude towards him; his exalted office in the Church would have shielded him from her criticism had he been less near akin; but he was her younger brother, and

her deep love for him did not blind her to his weaknesses. At the time of her great struggle in defence of her vocation he had been a formidable opponent instead of an ally, and when she won her victory he had shown complete indifference to her interests, and tried to insist that her new life should begin in Autun instead of Annecy. He had given her no reason to trust him, but family affection was peculiarly strong in them both, and she was ready in response to his desire for a House of the Visitation in his diocese.

André Frémyot had the social gifts which are connected with the Celtic temperament; he delighted in saying pleasant things unhampered by regard for accuracy. He assured his sister that Bourges was longing for her coming. She comments quaintly on the actual facts as she found them. The brilliant prospects of the Foundation had been painted in vivid colours and its financial position was to be as assured as its spiritual influence.

"The nine novices with ten thousand crowns each who were to endow our new monastery have reduced themselves to one. We have never yet made a venture that depended so entirely on Divine support, and that is our comfort in it."[1]

Bourges was in fact a very different experience from Grenoble; the townspeople showed no friendliness, and the erratic Archbishop embarrassed the little company with undesired luxuries and then forgot all about them till they were threatened with actual want. The new Order would hardly have won its fitting place in public esteem without the disciplined composure of Mme. de Chantal's rule during the first six months, but at the end of that time there were signs that its meaning was being recognised and her task there was accomplished. She had not warned Archbishop Frémyot that she regarded Bourges as a stage on her road to Paris, but before she quitted Annecy the plan of a

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 171.

Foundation there had been taking form in her mind and in that of François de Sales,[1] and just when she felt her presence at Bourges was ceasing to be essential, she received her summons to the new venture—for which Advent and Lent sermons had prepared the way.

A curious situation resulted. Archbishop Frémyot had intended to keep his sister near him for at least a year, and when she informed him that her Superior required her for fresh work in Paris, he refused to let her go and issued a command that no owner of post-horses in the city should hire them to her. He held high office and was powerful, but opposition only strengthened her resolve, and added a touch of the dramatic to the uninteresting details of the journey. She told him that if he succeeded in preventing her from obtaining a carriage she should take the road on foot for "obedience has strong legs". Perhaps, as he listened, dormant memories may have been awakened of days when the Archbishop and the Mother-Superior had been merely little boy and little girl, and in the frequent conflict of their wills hers had been proved invariably to be the strongest. However this may be it is certain that he capitulated, and they took leave of each other on affectionate terms.

In April, 1619, la Mère de Chantal came to Paris for the first time. Even the thought of Paris has a magic hold on the sons and daughters of France, and though a Religious of the Visitation had no part in its outward glories, she might be permitted a tremor of delight at the reflection that she was called to a work there which only she had been given power to accomplish. She came there, as she came to Grenoble, with the knowledge that her way had been prepared by François de Sales, but in ignorance of the immense difference between the experience that lay immediately before her and any other. It was not, for instance, the persons who were indifferent to religion and of

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1484.

lax or evil conduct who opposed the Foundation in Paris, in the tumultuous general life of the city, its coming or withdrawal would easily have passed unnoticed by such as these; instead its opponents were to be found in the ranks of the faithful, among whom—as François de Sales observed—"the spirit of the world is not altogether unrecognised".[1]

The religious revival of that period had already begun to lay hold upon such natures as were easily susceptible to influence, although its real strength was not yet declared. Support of Religious Houses was a very common expression of religious fervour, and it had a curious tendency to degenerate into partisanship; the particular Convent to which an individual had become attached must be upheld as the highest example of the Religious Life, and the pretensions of all others must be condemned; this seems to have been the point of view among the devout section of the people in Paris at that elementary stage of their awakening, and it was a serious hindrance to the prospects of the Visitation.

To François de Sales (who would have given a cordial welcome at Annecy to Carmelites or Clares or any other Order of real observance) the possibility of this state of mind was almost incredible.

"Oh, my dear Mother," he wrote to la Mère de Chantal at Bourges, "human caution is indeed wonderful! Can you believe that very sincere Servants of God, both men and women, have once more said to me to-day that the gentleness and devotion of the Visitation is so exactly suited to the French temperament that you will take away all the popularity of other Religious Houses, and that when this Mme. de Chantal has appeared no one else will be regarded! Of course this is nothing to trouble over. God sees that we are not coming to Paris to attract notice, but only that some souls may be drawn to show themselves to Him and serve Him purely, and He will help us."[2]

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1501.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1508.

Two months later la Mère de Chantal arrived, and was installed, with two Sisters and two novices who accompanied her, in the house in the Faubourg Saint Marceau prepared for her by the indefatigable Mme. des Gouffiers. It was characteristic of this lady's curiously haphazard methods that the house had a gambling den on either side; it seems also to have been very unhealthy, and was insufficiently furnished; possibly her whim at the moment was to demonstrate that the Congregation cherished a true love of poverty; the extreme discomfort to which they were exposed cannot otherwise be accounted for. She had written mysteriously to la Mère de Chantal that "her coming would give great pleasure, but that the conditions would be as small and humble as could possibly be imagined; that it was better not to enter into details, but to wait till she came and saw for herself, when she would find sufficient to test all her courage in God's service".[1]

The determination of the Mother was not likely to be daunted by the sensationalism of Mme. des Gouffiers; there was indeed no consideration imaginable that could have daunted her after she knew the mind of François de Sales in the matter. "Monseigneur tells me," she wrote, "that this undertaking is as important as it is possible to be both for the Glory of God and the firm establishment of our Order, and therefore we must further it resolutely through helps and hindrances."[2]

The history of her struggles through the helps and hindrances that awaited her can be gathered only from the glimpses given in her letters, and in considering these it should be remembered that she had not free access to the many sides of the life of Paris depicted in the memoirs of the time. Her reputation had preceded her, and her place was ready in the midst of the devout, for intercourse with her argued a recognition of unseen things and an aspiration after the ways of prayer. The real life of the capital,

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 186. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 184.

however, had at that period small concern with the practices of devotion, and her horizon would have been dangerously limited but for Celse-Bénigne and Françoise, who forced her to realise the existence of the vast multitude of average men and women for whom the atmosphere of Convent parlours had no attraction. The link through her children to the normal world, coupled with her own gift of insight, served to awaken, during those years in Paris, knowledge, which had lain too long dormant, of the actual temptations and difficulties of ordinary life, and such knowledge was essential if her influence was to extend to those outside her Convent walls.

Her difficulties, indeed, were manifold. Open opposition ceased as soon as she arrived, but those who had opposed the coming of the Visitation strove to divert it from its natural course. A Contemplative Order cannot take over the care of benevolent institutions and retain its own character, but responsibilities of this kind were pressed upon the Visitation in a manner that it was very difficult to resist. La Mère de Chantal was faced with the difficult task of evading the real intentions of influential people with whom it was essential to remain on amicable terms.[1] There were many cross-currents in the religious atmosphere of Paris, and when François de Sales had returned to Savoy she had no strong supporter. Vincent de Paul, to whom the spiritual charge of the Community had been entrusted, had not yet won recognition and could not be regarded as a protector, and it was dangerous to place too much reliance on friendly offers of assistance and advice. If there had not been a strong hand on the helm, the Visitation might have been so buffeted and swept about as to lose its true identity, and during the first weeks of life in Paris its progress was not encouraging.

"There is nothing much to say," wrote the Superior, after two months. "We have not yet found shelter."[2]

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 189, *note*. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 192.

François de Sales referred to his conditions in Paris as "ce tracas insupportable,"[1] and la Mère de Chantal had a similar experience. She apologises for not writing, but —"if you could only see the bustle in the midst of which it must be done"[2]—"truly it is not from lack of affection, but there is a desperate tumult here: moreover, we have changed our abode, have had one Profession and clothed six novices; that has meant a good deal to do, besides the perpetual daily business and interruptions, which are endless".[3]

The first move was made early in July, but it was a matter of infinite difficulty to find a site for a permanent house. The Superior was calm in the midst of innumerable difficulties however, and therefore the atmosphere of the Religious Life could be sustained. "You ask me, my dear daughter," she wrote in the early autumn, "if we are in poverty; yes, truly we are and I seldom give a thought to it. Heaven and Earth may pass away, but the Word of God remains as the groundwork of our hopes.

"The degree of want at which we arrive sometimes gives us deep lessons in perfection and trust in God, and indeed we have been shown already how truly it is worth while to look to God and hope in Him when humanly there is no ground for hope, for by Divine Grace our beginning here is a thousand times more successful than we could dare to expect."[4]

A heavier test than mere poverty awaited her. In September, 1619, there was an outbreak of the plague in Paris. Apart from the danger to the lives of the Sisters it was disastrous to their position. They depended on the friendship and support of those who sought them out and learnt gradually to desire their presence as a permanent institution in the city, but the circle that was gathering

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1502.
[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 189. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 197.
[4] *Ibid.* Lett. 201.

round la Mère de Chantal scattered at the first whisper of the dread infection, and the little Company was left to struggle for existence as best they might. The letters of the Superior betray no disturbance. She had been mourning the departure of François de Sales, but her regret changed to rejoicing at the thought that he had escaped danger. "Do not be alarmed about us, my dear daughter," she wrote, "even when it is very near; but pray earnestly that God may fulfil His Holy Will in us."[1] And a little later: "I write in great haste just to let you know that by God's mercy we all continue well. Do not be anxious, there are now no cases in the house next door."[2]

By Christmas the scare was over, and Paris returned to normal conditions. Those who had begun to discover the spirit of the Visitation were not estranged by a temporary absence, and it grew evident that the danger of the new Foundation would not be from isolation but from overpressure. It was one to which the Superior was fully alive. She wrote to Lyons: "It is said that there are many claims upon your parlour; that is the case here also; but I think it need be no hindrance to our recollectedness or to any real duties. If it were so, in a place where there are so many people of all degrees, we could not get on; truly I am infinitely desirous of holding our duty to God and our observance above any respect of persons. What more can I say, my daughter, save that blessed are they who are content in seeking God only."[3]

It is clear that her task made extraordinary demands upon her. The long-past experience of the woman of the world supported the deep spirituality of the Religious, and all her capacities were concentrated on one object: the building up of the Visitation on such perfect lines that it would be a perpetual witness for God in a place where Satan had so many witnesses, and would commemorate its

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 208.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 210. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 219.

Founder among those who had had no personal knowledge of him. She told la Mère Favre that the importance of the Paris House surpassed that of any other; it would be the training-school of the Order in France, and so would need especially a Mother Superior who was gentle and wise, strict in observance and self-repression yet full of enthusiasm.[1]

Already there were many who desired acceptance as novices although it was only nine months since la Mère de Chantal arrived in Paris, and there was still no Monastery suited to be the home of the Congregation. In her letters she asks for prayers that this grave difficulty may be solved.[2] Living was very expensive and the Visitation could only take its fitting place if some of the novices came from wealthy families; yet these were deterred by the lack of an established house. And no consideration of riches influenced the Superior in acceptance and rejection. She knew all the criticism she would excite among her friends by some of her decisions, but, except where she owed obedience, she was unmoved by the opinion of others.

"I am wearied with writing and with the fuss there has been here," she told la Mère Favre, "we have just sent away the richest and most notable novice we have had; but I would rather die than allow those who are not suited to us to remain and so be unfaithful to the spirit of our Order."[3]

That was written in April, just a year after her first coming; only two months later events were justifying her severity: "We have admirable novices who are beginning really to satisfy me—and I am a little hard to please".[4]

Life was difficult, however. Her own desire and the deep purpose of the Visitation was for a hidden way sheltered from observation and independent of the wishes of those who accepted the world's standards, but to found a Religious House in Paris and endeavour to keep it hidden was to

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 224.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 226.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. iv., Lett. 245.
[4] *Ibid.* Lett. 259.

condemn it to uselessness and failure. It required the genius for government of the first Superior to hold the balance between laxity and impotence. We have the best indication of the problems that arose and the theory by which she dealt with them in her own words, again to la Mère Favre, on the method of dealing with great folk who demanded her presence even when she was in chapel. "Here—unless it is some great ecclesiastic or a princess—they are told that we are at Office and I do not come out, but I do have the message brought to me, so that I may judge what it is best to do in case it is some one of such standing that one dared not keep them waiting. I am telling you this that you and other Superiors may do the same; until now I have not dared to take this line, I have been so afraid of giving offence; but our Rule binds me and I say so; the result is that people are impressed instead of being impatient; and indeed unless we do this we shall be overwhelmed, wasted, and distracted more than we should be in the world. Truly I have not come here to leave undone all that I undertake, and unless they are such persons as I have mentioned when the bell for Office rings I say Good-bye. I am right in doing so, am I not, my daughter? If I did not I should never have a possibility of recollectedness."[1]

The necessity of the expedient that had so taxed her courage is self-evident; unless she defended herself she would have become the prey of frivolous and inquisitive intruders, but there was never any narrowness in her view of the conditions essential to the Religious Life. "If it is God who draws us to prayer," she said, "neither manual labour nor necessary intercourse with other people will be any hindrance. The Spirit of God does not depend on our seclusion, rather can He uphold and perfect us anywhere. Who was ever more completely in the world or more subjected to perpetual and never-ending claims than Madame

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 254.

Acarie? And was her Vision clouded on that account? There is a sort of spiritual fussiness which is utter folly."[1]

There was much to disturb her besides the insistent demands for personal dealing. The important question of their monastery was at length settled. In October, 1620, she discovered exactly what she wanted and was confident that God had led her to it.[2] The negotiations were long and troublesome, but the house that was finally secured, the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon, Rue des Celestins, was really adapted to their needs. It was a central position and in a quarter where their presence was likely to be valued. "Considering it is in the town, it is a beautiful house and large,"[3] wrote la Mère de Chantal, with a glow of pardonable pride. The capacity that had unravelled the tangled web of the Rabutin finance had been applied to the problem of house-hunting in Paris, and it had not lost its effectiveness in the interval. "It will cost us nearly twenty thousand crowns, but it is a satisfactory one, and, which is more to the purpose, it is one for which thirty thousand and forty thousand crowns have been asked."[4]

The business undertakings that would have daunted others disturbed her very little, but from all directions came other assaults on her tranquillity. Political intrigue deprived her brother, the Archbishop of Bourges, of his high office; she had the difficult question of a marriage for Françoise to decide; Celse-Bénigne was in bad company and as wild as others of his race, and in Paris she could not veil her eyes from facts regarding him which there were common knowledge. Later, in the winter of 1621, when, as she wrote, "the town is overshadowed by the news that comes daily of the loss of the best, the bravest, and the worthiest of all ranks, and there is mourning everywhere,"[5] she had her share in the general tribulation, for both her son and her son-in-law were fighting. And, while her hands

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 346. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 290.
[3] *Ibid.* Lett. 316. [4] *Ibid.* Lett. 319. [5] *Ibid.* Lett. 354.

were fully occupied with the most important of Foundations, there were many new ones in contemplation, and two, at Orleans and at Belley, actually begun. In the future she was warned that her presence would be needed at Turin. The Prince of Piedmont, recently married to Christine of France, sister of Louis XIII, was devoted to François de Sales and desired this Foundation, and he insisted on having "la Madre ancienne," as she described herself.[1] The future promised no hope of quiet, therefore, and the longing for it was a weakness not to be permitted. "Never allow yourself to think of being released from Office, most dear daughter," she wrote to la Mère Favre, "we must bear the burden for Our Lord. Some day it may please Him to let us have a little rest together. Ah, how sweet that would be to us both!"[2]

The ordinary cares of Office were only a fraction of her burden. It was her part to control and encourage and rebuke the Superiors of the other Houses, and also the more difficult spirits under them, besides her own immediate flock. It is these letters of direction which have kept the personality of Jeanne de Chantal alive during three centuries, and it is the concentrated force expended in each one which gives them their vitality. A large number were written during those crowded years in Paris, and, though they contain occasional protestations that time fails, there are no tokens of hasty judgment or slackening sympathy. To the reflective mind there can be no stronger evidence of the immense power she possessed than this capacity for detachment. In her years of marriage and early widowhood she had proved herself to be greatly gifted, but only when her vocation drew her away from normal life did her true genius find full scope and full development.

Her life in Paris held much adversity, some of it self-evident, but that which oppressed her most is only suggested

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 311. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 290.

by her letters: "Monseigneur has so much business that he does not remember to say half what we want of him".[1] "I am just going to write to Monseigneur to ask him to say quite clearly what we are to do, for he tells me nothing"[2]—so she wrote to other Superiors. Truly the days of *la Maison de la Galerie*, when the Founder knew and directed every detail, must have seemed very long ago, and there are many indications of a hunger that she could not suppress, to have, if only for a little while, another chance of advice and encouragement and sympathy from her guide and leader.

"Oh, my daughter, pray for me with all your strength that I may have grace to yield to God and to His use of me. I desire to do so with my whole heart, but I am conscious of a longing for our spiritual father which is continual though it is free from impatience or anxiety. Very likely it may still be a very long time before it is satisfied; nevertheless I can say, 'God's Holy Will be done,' with all my heart."[3]

It was in August, 1620, that those lines were written, and not until February, 1622, did she escape. Even then there was much grumbling. "It is extraordinary," she wrote, "how they all dread my going."[4] But her work was well established; she left nineteen professed Sisters and many novices, and a Superior who was greatly respected. They had a circle of real friends, and their spiritual charge was in the hands of Vincent de Paul. At the end of February, 1622, she received the formal order from François de Sales and left Paris amid many lamentations. The influence of the Visitation had spread widely in the years since her arrival there. "I believe that God is blessing us greatly," she said, "there seems every likelihood that we shall have Foundations in many of the chief towns. May He give us grace to be founded in righteousness."[5]

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 259. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 319.
[3] *Ibid.* Lett. 283. [4] *Ibid.* Lett. 319. [5] *Ibid.* Lett. 291.

Rapid growth was dangerous, however, and it was their Founder's wish that she should visit all the new Houses before she returned to Annecy, and that she should open one at Dijon. She obeyed with unflagging energy, though the difficulties so recently conquered in Paris had to be faced again. Suitable shelter was very hard to find, and the enthusiastic souls who were so eager to invite the Community never made practical preparations for their coming. Her native place made her welcome, but her old friends were more eager to visit her than to give solid monetary support. It was six months before she was able to transfer the reins of government to la Mère Favre. On October 28, 1622, she left Dijon for Lyons, where she was to meet François de Sales.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAY OF SORROW.

1622.

THERE was one episode in the record of Ste. Chantal's stay in Paris which had no effect on the development of the Congregation, but was momentous in her own history. It should be remembered that the birth of the Visitation was contemporary with the celebrated protest of Angelique Arnauld against the corruption of the Religious Life, and it would have been impossible for the Abbess of Port Royal and the Superior at Annecy to be wholly indifferent to each other's existence when distance no longer separated them. In fact François de Sales was determined to bring them together long before Ste. Chantal reached Paris.

Angelique had given early proof of her vigorous character and sincerity of purpose. She had been forced to take the veil in childhood, and authority and a measure of independence had been committed to her while she was still a girl. The opening of her career was indeed a flagrant example of the abuse which so often brought religion to dishonour in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and, when the call of God to self-dedication forced itself upon her, it necessitated an alteration of standard and of practice as drastic as if she had been living under the most worldly conditions. When François de Sales came to Paris in 1618 she was still under thirty, but she had succeeded in reforming her own Monastery of Port Royal, and had been sent to Maubuisson that she might endeavour to regulate the specially scandalous disorders that prevailed there. The

sensational incidents that marked this mission of hers brought her name into prominence, and her conduct won her the respect of all those who were concerned in the same warfare against the misuses of holy things. Therefore when her great desire for personal touch with François de Sales prompted her to ask him to visit Maubuisson he came to her readily.

Subsequent letters to Ste. Chantal reveal the impression that she made upon him. She became one of the most cherished of his spiritual daughters, and it was the claim of Port Royal that she held the second place in his affections and was given a share in the spiritual union that existed between himself and the Superior of the Visitation.[1] Many years before he had told Mme. de Chantal that he desired she should have "the courage of a man". If we set aside modern thought and prejudice, it is easier to see what S. François meant by that expression. The women of whom he had intimate knowledge are revealed in graphic detail by his letters to them, and we see the degree to which they were self-concentrated, thirsting continually for religious experience, but so introspective that his task of leading them to spiritual realisation was one of great difficulty. The weaknesses with which he had to contend seemed to him to be the ordinary feminine attributes, and he did not realise that the special victims of them were drawn to him by his own gentle and responsive personality.

In refreshing contrast a few figures stand out among his spiritual children. Ste. Chantal, by every right, is foremost among them, but it cannot be claimed for her that she surpassed Angelique Arnauld in those virile qualities which he desired to cultivate. It is possible that his admiration for these, by reason of their contrast with his ordinary experience, went too far, and influenced him in his direction of the Abbess of Port Royal at a very important epoch.

[1] "Mem. pour servir a l'histoire de Port Royal," tome i., 10me Relation.

Her contact with him and with Mme. de Chantal altered her outlook; the spirit of humility and of love represented by the Visitation made a profound impression on her, and her vision of herself as a reformer faded before a higher ideal of self-surrender. She desired to begin her Religious Life again as a novice in the Order of the Visitation, and the belief that in this she would find the fulfilment of her true vocation grew upon her till it became an absorbing force. If she had been supported by the authority of her Director she had courage and resolve sufficient to have overcome, with his assistance, all the obstacles that lay in her path. But François de Sales regarded the work of reform on which she was engaged with too much respect to consent lightly to its abandonment, and up to the time of his death he was not persuaded that her wish was of Divine suggestion.

It is clear that on this point the opinion of la Mère de Chantal did not accord with his. In her letters to him after he left Paris it is evident that she hopes his mind will change, and she will be permitted to welcome Angelique Arnauld to the House at Annecy. Their intimacy had revealed to her the many difficult qualities in the strong nature that first made Port Royal famous, and she believed that the Rule and the training of her beloved Order would refine and mould it to its highest use. For a time indeed the two adopted the relation of Superior and Novice, and she was made the recipient of the searching self-accusations of a soul in which penitence expressed itself by recurring waves of fear and self-abhorrence. She suggested and guided and admonished as if the imperious Abbess was indeed under her authority, and, when the death of François de Sales destroyed all hope of realising their dream, the links between them were firmly riveted and survived the heavy strain that the future held in store.

Probably when they said good-bye before Mme. de Chantal left Paris for Dijon, they believed that their parting would not be a long one, and they can have had no

premonition of the coming tragedy. It is true that Mme. de Chantal with her intimate knowledge of the health and the circumstances of François de Sales was often gravely anxious, and at times anxiety grew into an agony of apprehension that proved how little the silence and separation she had accepted had modified the place he held in her life. She knew that the strain of his life of labour had so undermined his vitality that rest of hand and brain were essential to him, while at the same time his generous kindliness made him the prey of those marauders who at all times abound in the ranks of the devout. There were occasions when he acknowledged that he was overwhelmed. "No one desires more than just one word—or just a line on paper, and so every moment goes."[1] From a man with a great charge and a great purpose that is a cry of despair.

Although it cannot be denied that Mme. de Chantal brooded over the perils that surrounded him despite all her aspirations towards detachment, her realisation of the full force and value of his powers is her excuse, if excuse be needed, and in that realisation she strove to find comfort. She knew that he permitted himself the fatal resource of the over-worked and turned night into day. "I should not be able to endure the thought of these night watches of Monseigneur," she wrote to M. Favre, who was the Bishop's Confessor at Annecy, "if I had not faith that the good God must have a special intention of preserving him for His greater glory. But so far as you can, my dear Father, you must try and protect him from interruptions in the day-time. He is so extraordinarily gentle that he can never refuse anyone."[2]

Her experience of Paris deepened her sense of the world's need of this pure spirit. During her sojourn there the rumour of his appointment as Coadjutor and ultimate successor to Archbishop Gondi was afloat. To her and to the

[1] Quoted by Ste. Chantal, "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 339.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 222.

little company at Annecy the appointment meant devastating loss, but she had seen enough to understand what he might have power to accomplish if he was allowed any authority in Paris. "When I think of the work you are doing," she wrote to him, "all my desire is that you should remain where you are, but if I look elsewhere and reflect that God may call you away for His greater glory I feel that I am indifferent, with nothing but an intense longing that Our Lord's good pleasure should be fulfilled in us."[1] Her knowledge of life in Paris did not go far enough to show her that François de Sales was not of those likely to obtain coveted preferment there. She did not know the labyrinth of interest and intrigue surrounding such appointments, and she recorded every rumour that reached her in her Convent parlour with guileless eagerness. At length however she became conscious of the shadow of something evil, and regretted that her letters to Annecy should have been full of a topic that she knew instinctively was unworthy of consecrated souls. She felt herself personally to have been demoralised. "Even if I have avoided actual lying," she wrote to François de Sales, referring to her recent communications, "I know that I have failed in real sincerity. May God preserve me from ever again slipping away from the absolute truth and simplicity which I ought to maintain with my very dear Father."[2]

François de Gondi, afterwards the notorious Cardinal de Retz, then a brilliant youth of twenty-five, was preferred to the Bishop of Geneva and became Coadjutor and, later, Archbishop of Paris, and Mme. de Chantal looked forward with confidence to a return to Annecy under its accustomed conditions. During the last months of her stay in Paris the renunciation that was required of her had strained her fortitude to its utmost limits. She had not seen François de Sales for two years, and she was yearning for the inspiration of his personal counsels. She did not hide the

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 228. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 232.

intensity of her desire because she meant to hide nothing from him, but she may have known that the fact of it delayed her permission to return. "If I must remain longer," she told him, "I am the more ready to do so because it involves such a great sacrifice to God—a greater one than it is possible for you to realise; for it seems to me that if either you or I should meet death before I have had one more opportunity of coming to you in confession, I shall be the victim of infinite distress and apprehension." [1]

As we have seen he required her to make the sacrifice it was impossible for him to realise, and she set out on her homeward route only when the real claim of further business for the Community was stronger than that of the well-established House in Paris. When in October, 1622, she reached Lyons, François de Sales was passing through the city accompanying the Cardinal of Savoy to Avignon. It was then nearly three years since they had parted, and the letters between them had become fewer and fewer. The possibility of this chance meeting must have seemed to her as a direct gift from God, but their interview was only momentary, and was occupied with directions for visits he desired her to make to the Branch Houses of Montferrand and Saint-Etienne. She was to return to Lyons to meet him at the beginning of December, in the midst of the excitement caused by the temporary residence of the Court.

During her stay at Saint-Etienne Mme. de Chantal went into Retreat. Only a few days divided her from the opportunity of spiritual renewal on which her hopes had been centring for years. With her ardent temperament any desire that she admitted became a ruling thought, and the longing that was to be fulfilled at Lyons must necessarily have occupied her mind in a time of silence. Once again she had to bring her innermost being to rigorous self-judgment and assure herself that she was ready to accept any denial meted out to her, that the old delight in complete un-

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 344.

derstanding had been surrendered, and her will would never close round it again. Only when she was satisfied of this could she apply herself to the two separate records of difficulties on which she needed his assistance, those of her own soul and those concerning the Community. Thus prepared she went to Lyons, and awaited the time when François de Sales could escape from his multifarious engagements. Day after day she waited, schooling herself to the surrender that checks impatience, and at length he came. They met in the Convent parlour. "We have some free hours," he said, "which of us shall be the one to talk?"

Mme. de Chantal, always eager and impulsive, and feeling herself at last in reach of all she longed for so intensely, was prompt in answer: "Let it be me, Father, my soul needs help from you so much".

Their three years of entire separation were to be the last of his course on earth, and for him they had been years of very swift advance. No doubt he had outstripped her, and was astonished to find himself so far ahead. His reply was gentle but very grave: "How is this," he said, "do you still wish greatly and want to choose for yourself? I thought that I should find you really consecrated. We will leave anything that is personal until we meet at Annecy. We will keep this time for the business of the Congregation."

She did not plead against her sentence, but put away the record of herself her hand was clutching, and took out that which concerned their Congregation. He had much to say, for the Visitation was very dear to him, and no pressure of affairs ever made him less thoughtful of its interests. So the four hours passed, and at the end he gave her his blessing and told her to start forthwith for Grenoble, and so by way of Valance, Belley, and Chamberi, back to Annecy. Before long he would return there also, and her long period of test seemed to be near its end. But she set out with a very heavy heart and infinite regret that the chance to

unveil her soul before him had been denied her. His rebuke shows that the human in her had surged up and self-repression failed at the crucial moment. She had found her vocation by his guidance; it was with his help she had struggled upwards, mounting constantly to higher and higher flights of aspiration, and, though all this belonged to the former things that had been put away, after three years of solitary effort and unremitting self-discipline, a touch of the old fervour had greeted his approach. Nothing could convey the immensity of the self-conquest demanded of her more vividly than its momentary failure. The story of it came from her own lips, and it is likely that she was aware of its significance. Her manner of looking back at her own record was absolutely simple. In her own eyes she appeared merely to have followed the course that was set before her, to have stumbled in it and showed unworthiness, but not otherwise to have had much personal concern with it. The great ordeal through which she passed ranked in her mind among inevitable things, and the woman who emerged from it could regard the self that had been with complete detachment.

In the calm of old age the process of events in that December must have furnished a satisfying subject for reflection. The fever of experience had died out so long since, that it was possible to follow the moulding of the Hand of God upon her life, and to mark the inexorable force of the deprivation destined for her, with all its detail of intimate regret and suffering of which she alone had knowledge.

She spent Christmas at Grenoble, and on the Feast of the Holy Innocents when, as was her daily habit, she was praying for François de Sales, it seemed to her that a voice said clearly in her ear, "*Il n'est plus*". "Ah, no," her heart responded, "indeed he himself lives no longer. It is Thou, my God, that livest in him." It was in this sense that she took the supernatural intimation of what in fact had

happened, and rejoiced in it without any suspicion of the truth. Afterwards she had misgivings as to the literal meaning of the phrase, but the reality was so unthinkable that she was resolute in putting it away from her and left Grenoble for Belley with a light heart, for each stage of her journey was bringing her nearer to her beloved Annecy. She was escorted by M. Michel Favre, the Confessor of the Community, and news of the tragedy at Lyons had been conveyed to him immediately after its occurrence. His reason for withholding it is not made clear. He took elaborate measures to prevent its reaching her on her way to Belley. It was known at the Convent there before her arrival, but the Sisters agreed to conceal their grief, and she passed the evening cheerfully and went to rest without suspicion of the truth.

On Innocents Day François de Sales had died of apoplexy at Lyons. The suddenness of the disaster paralysed the judgment of those who surrounded Mme. de Chantal, for if, as may have been, her bereavement was a hundredfold greater than theirs, so also was her capacity to meet it worthily. Each individual confronted with the task of telling her found reason for postponement, until she forced the truth by an innocent inquiry. Some of the Capuchins at Belley visited her in the presence of M. Favre, and she expressed astonishment that no tidings had come from Lyons. M. Favre, seeing that the inevitable moment had come, told her that the Bishop had had a stroke. She said at once that she must start for Lyons.

The priest's reply was to give her the letter from the brother and successor of François de Sales which described what had happened. Mme. de Chantal's own words are the best record of what that moment meant to her. "My heart beat very quick," she says. "I tried to surrender myself entirely to God, for I had a strong feeling that there was something painful in the letter. In that moment of reflection I saw the meaning of the words I had heard at

Grenoble, '*Il n'est plus*,' and as I read that sacred letter it came to me in all its fullness. I sank on to my knees prostrate before the Omnipotence of God and bowed down by the immensity of my sorrow. All the remainder of that day and all night until after the Holy Communion I wept, constantly yet without violence, for I was resting and at peace in the Divine Will, and in the thought of the joy our blessed one had reached. For God gave me clear understanding and a great certainty of the wonder of grace He had conferred upon him, and with it an immense desire to live as this servant of God has taught me."

There was no failure in self-mastery. The day after the blow fell Mme. de Chantal wrote to Lyons a gentle demand for the conveyance of the body to its natural resting-place at Annecy, and carried that difficult negotiation to its successful end as skilfully as if no shadow of distress had touched her. Nor did she fail in one of the commissions François de Sales had given her at Lyons. She finished her round of visits to the new Foundations of the Visitation, and went to Rumilly where it had been his wish that she should inaugurate reformed conditions for the Bernardine Order. She devoted a week to the task—which demanded infinite tact and patience—and effected a temporary exchange between three or four Bernardines and her Sisters from Annecy, that the spirit of the Visitation might act as leaven on the irregularities and slackness of the older Community. This was not a possible achievement for a mind abandoned to selfish grief. It may be admitted that at Lyons she had fallen from the standard set before her, but it was merely a surface failure, the momentary mastery of human impulse long repressed. A crushing penalty had been exacted, and by her submission to it self-conquest was at last achieved.

She returned at length to Annecy to receive the coffin of the Founder which, for three months, was given temporary resting-place outside the Convent grille, awaiting the com-

pletion of its splendid tomb in the chapel. He had bidden her keep all she wished to tell him until they met at Annecy. The nuns remembered that she spent many hours during those three months in silent prayer beside him, but she never gave way to violent tokens of distress or faltered as she took up the burden shared till then. There was much of her inward history and of his which she imparted freely to the Sisters of the Visitation that they might profit by it, but a veil drops over the experience of those months. On earth these two renounced the joy of personal communication. Mme. de Chantal, having left behind all the world gives at the call of Religion, was required also to lay down the gift that had seemed to come to her direct from God. We know that she did not do so without a long and bitter struggle, and perhaps the battle was only won at the time of their last parting. But she had won it, and it may be that their voluntary severance in life, completed just in time, achieved for them a new and more perfect union when death seemed to divide them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VISITATION AND ITS FOUNDER.

KNEELING beside the bier of François de Sales, Jeanne de Chantal faced the future and the new task it held. That which she suffered was so searching in its nature that her courage must either have been broken by it or else supremely purified. She was of those who must needs drink each cup of tribulation to the dregs, and the remembrance of the opportunity forfeited at Lyons evoked in her a poignancy of regret which was an infinite aggravation of sorrow. She had hoped and prayed and waited for a great moment which—as she believed—would have given her strength and enlightenment for coming years, and she had missed it. Humanly, the future as it stretched before her was blank and desolate; it was likely to contain no landmarks save of excessive difficulty, yet as we have seen she never flinched. Her letters of that time contain no wailing, no cries even of weariness. "My heart has never known so great a blow," she wrote to her faithful friend la Mère Favre, "but also it has never been so much at peace."[1] It would seem that she was, in actual fact, completely occupied with the "immense desire to live as this servant of God has taught me," and this was no state of temporary exaltation which failed when the hour for reaction came; it was continuous.

The suddenness and horror of the blow that fell upon her is a matter of history, there was no earthly remedy for the wound that it inflicted, but in the silent hours of which

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 427.

we have no record, when she was once again alone with the guide of all her sacrifice and labour, it may be that a miracle of healing was wrought at the bier of S. François, of which there is no mention in the evidence that declared his sanctity.

The responsibility of government which la Mère Chantal was forced to assume was heavy, for many questions concerning the Visitation were still undecided when its Founder died. But that was only a portion of her task. Through all the years of her association with him she had venerated him as a saint, yet she realised that his personal effectiveness, immense though it had been, could not survive the individuals who had felt his influence, and because he had not sought celebrity or recognition while he lived it seemed possible that his example and his teaching might be forgotten. This la Mère Chantal was determined to prevent, and it became the paramount object of her life to keep his memory vivid in the minds of men. In the years immediately succeeding his death the popularity of his published writings was her best support.

The appearance of the "Introduction to the Devout Life" marked an era in the history of devotional literature and it won immediate celebrity. The books that could be resorted to for spiritual guidance at that time were few, and their purport for the most part was alarming; no provision had been made for the realisation of a spiritual religion in the midst of normal life, and the way of devotion was the way towards the cloister or the hermit's cell. S. François has had so many imitators that now it is not easy to realise a period in which suggestions such as his had no existence. They appear completely simple, but they came (with the strength of ecclesiastical authority) to disheartened souls who had no hope or expectation that a way so gentle could be open to them. The recorded experiences of Mme. de Chantal show the need for the gentle methods which she sought in vain until she met the author

of the "Devout Life," and her experience was only a more violent form of that which many others suffered. Some of the material of the celebrated treatise may be found in the letters that went from Annecy to Burgundy in the early days before her vocation had declared itself, but the book as a whole was not compiled for her but for Louise, the wife of Claude de Charmoisy, a gentleman of Savoy, and kinsman to the Sales family. It is through his dealing with this lady that we learn the mind of François de Sales in relation to the world and the root of his power with his own and succeeding generations. He had seen her at his cousin's house at Annecy and in the country, and had recognised in her the instinct of devotion. When, in 1607, he preached throughout Lent in Annecy he wrote to Mme. de Chantal—in the course of the free communication of his hopes and interests which he practised then—that his net had drawn in a prize he had been wishing for for four years. "I must confess I am delighted, I may say extremely so. I ask your prayers for her that Our Lord may confirm those impulses which He has stirred in her heart."[1] In those days when educated women appealed to him for help he made an endeavour to bring them into touch with Mme. de Chantal, and this he was eager to do in the case of Mme. de Charmoisy. Clearly she was not easy to deal with, and her extreme reticence would have baffled a guide with less skill and less enthusiasm. He confesses that, for the first year after a great spiritual effort (he termed this the year of novitiate), he is always anxious,[2] and in fact it took a year to break down her reserve; in the Lent after that in which he rejoiced over the prize his net secured, he records that she has written to him for the first time concerning her soul; "her lack of hurry and excitement is admirable".[3]

Advance had not been rapid in the year that had elapsed since he began the task of introducing her to the devout

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 371.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 408. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 432.

life, as it might be lived by a lady of high degree who was both wife and mother, but there may have been something inspiring to his eager temperament in her coldness. Certainly the book that results from their connection suggests a definite personality as its object and not a mere vague type; and moreover the reticence which was tardy in response, even to him, evoked a clarity of expression and of method very different from the crowded imagery and unstudied reflections of his ordinary letters to Mme. de Chantal. Louise de Charmoisy therefore, as an individual, was important to the career of François de Sales, and when, after his book was published, he was describing the occasion for its composition to one of its admirers her individuality is very clearly in his mind. "It was not a task that I set myself," he says, "but a memorandum drawn up for a very pure soul that had sought direction from me, and it was accomplished during a Lent when I was preaching twice a week. She showed it to Père Fourier at Chamberi who, as she knew, was my great friend. It was he who urged me so strongly to publish it that, after a little hasty correction, I sent it to the printer." Referring to one criticism that had been brought against it, he continues: "You say that for a mere 'Introduction' Philothée is required to advance too far. The explanation of this is that the soul with which I dealt was already highly disciplined though she had never essayed the devout life, and therefore she went far in a very short time." [1]

It is clear then that Philothée was no imaginary type, and her director, unconscious of his own achievement, questioned whether the demand for the book written for her would justify a reprint and give him an opportunity to correct and alter. In fact, fifty editions were issued in his lifetime, and the overwork which shortened his life may in part be traced to the impression produced by the unassuming little volume. It was natural that those who

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 514.

benefited by it should expect still greater benefit from personal intercourse with its writer, and, as we have seen, he was singularly incapable of self-defence and gave of his best to all who asked.

His "Introduction" did indeed, as its name implies, make known to innumerable souls the possibility of re-adjusting their method of existence so as to give devotion a more fitting place. Some among them, moving through diverse stages of experience, came at length to one of the Houses of the Visitation, as if that was the necessary sequel of the venture to which its Founder had inspired them; others—like Mme. des Gouffiers—missed his real spirit and were only moved passingly by the charm of his teaching and his personality; but it was to dwellers in the world whose duties held them to their place that the value of the "Introduction" was inestimable; to them it opened a prospect that was completely new.

It is plain that the mind of S. François pictured an ideal state in which only a slender barrier would divide the life of the Religious and that of the laity, and all conditions would invite the Christian soul to the practice of the Presence of God. But the ideal state was not to be found in the France of the seventeenth century, and all his efforts accomplished was but a touch on the outskirts of a great problem. His scheme of the Visitation, if its original form had been preserved, would have served as a link between the Religious and the charitable lay-woman, and in its actual development it brought a true form of the life of the cloister within reach of devout souls who in former times must have sighed for it in vain. Ripe experience taught him the value of the work he had been allowed to do; when ill-health and many disappointments brought the shadow of discouragement in their train, he could always turn to this one consolatory thought. As he expressed it in a letter written a little while before his death: "When I consider our humble little Visitation which works so

greatly for the glory of God I find a spark of comfort in being Bishop of this diocese. I have at least done this."[1]

It was his intention to commemorate his intercourse with the nuns of the Visitation, and especially their Superior, in the volume that was to contain the deepest spirit of his teaching: his treatise on The Love of God.[2] At the time of its appearance this work made a deep impression, but it is less read by later generations and it does not lend itself to translation. No useful purpose is served by a comparison between the treatise and the "Introduction"; the one is intended for elect and special spirits, while the full meaning of the other is accessible to the ordinary intelligence, yet the difference between the two books indicates the difference in the writer's attitude towards the two souls who had been chiefly in his mind as he wrote each of them. When he wrote for Louise de Charmoisy, he had before him one who "had never assayed the devout life," and, intending to reach her only, he reached besides a host of anxious souls in his own generation and in those that have succeeded; but when he wrote for the mind and spirit that met and answered to his own in every detail, he did not need to pause and assure himself that he was easily intelligible. In his letters to Jeanne de Chantal he refers to his work as "ours," not as "mine," and to her and many others who had felt the infection of his burning faith, the possession of his treatise was a privilege beyond human deserts. Their reverend appreciation could not be transmitted in its entirety beyond their own generation, however; to them it spoke with his voice, but when his voice was silent it needed interpretation.

It is well that there are other and simpler records of his teaching to his daughters of the Visitation. In *la Maison de la Galerie*, as we have seen, the Community would gather round their Founder, learning from him and confiding

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1310.

[2] "Traité de l'Amour de Dieu," 2 vols., pub. 1616.

in him with an intimacy that was the more cherished because they knew it must be transient. His gentleness made candour possible, and the first Sisters were so open over their individual feelings and over the pitfalls each discovered in the life they had embraced, that, out of their experience, he drew his image of what a Sister of the Visitation ought to be.

Those were the precious days of infancy ; later, when growth was swift and rapid, their education became more definite and they received collective teaching from S. François. His many avocations made regularity impossible, and there were occasions when, after having begged him, to address them, Mme. de Chantal grew contrite because of the additional labour laid upon him. But he came readily. The Sisters were as his own children to him, and he could always gather material for his discourse from the questions he encouraged them to put. He made no notes beforehand, and there could be no record by his own hand of teaching that was hardly more than his own part in a conversation; but to his hearers every word was precious and they combined to keep a regular report of all he said. These were written down and, when Branch Houses came into being, copies were handed on to them as a sacred possession of the Congregation. The task of copying was allowed to pass into unworthy hands, however, and after his death a printed version of the precious manuscript (which had been becoming more and more inaccurate) made its unexpected appearance in the book market.

There was a great sensation among the friends of the Community and great indignation among its members when they heard of this audacious venture, but the volume appeared mysteriously, and much time might have been wasted in an endeavour to trace the culprit. Her capacity for swift and decisive action did not fail la Mère de Chantal at this crisis: she obtained the suppression of the garbled

version by royal authority, and "The Real Discourses" according to the careful reports preserved at Annecy were issued. The unknown literary pirate did good service in forcing the publication of the volume while la Mère de Chantal was able to edit it, for no record could be more valuable in any endeavour to realise the spirit of the Visitation. In treating of the many difficulties and vicissitudes through which the Community passed, and of its visible progress, it is easy to lose sight of the vision of it that possessed the mind of its Founder. "It is intended," so he wrote when its growing life was firmly established, "to secure for God souls so given to prayer and the interior life that they may be found worthy for the service of His Infinite Majesty and worthy to worship Him *in spirit and in truth.* It is my desire that my daughters should leave it to the great Orders that are already established in the Church to do honour to Our Lord by maintaining the glory of their religious exercises, and that they should make no attempt to honour Him save by their abasement." [1]

Among the activities of English life in the twentieth century it may not be easy to realise the contemplative as offering the truest service to God; nevertheless now as in all ages the true contemplative is the surest support of the Catholic faith. He has also another and more intimate function: the witness of a life entirely dedicated to prayer touches the imagination of those whose use of life is on other lines, and through that channel the will is kindled and the dormant souls of men and women roused to embark upon the search for God. The vocation of the Religious, whether active or contemplative, comes to him by Divine suggestion; vocation means God's summons to a soul in the world or in the cloister, and only in this aspect does the Religious vocation cease to be repellent to the natural man. The deviation from God's purpose, otherwise known as sin, has made the atmosphere of ordinary life

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvii., Lett. 1094.

uncongenial to the practice of prayer. When François de Sales published the book that was to show the way of devotion to dwellers in the world, he was accused of addressing to seculars the teaching that was suited to nuns; and, in fact, every true endeavour for the object he had chosen was necessarily liable to such an accusation, because the life of prayer, however secretly maintained, must come into collision with the ordinary customs of the world. His experience had taught him that the soul capable of attaining to the heights of prayer in the surroundings of normal life is so rare as hardly to be discoverable, but that there were many whom God summoned away from normal life that they might pray. His vision of his daughters as fulfilling tasks that were outwardly useful faded before a later ideal. Instead of practical service they were to be "so given to prayer and to the interior life that they might be found worthy to worship in spirit and in truth".

In fact the most sublime aspiration could not soar too high for the aim of the Visitation as its Founder pictured it, while at the same time its lowliness was not to be a thing of phrases but must find practical demonstration in the life of every individual member; and this paradox is the chief burden of the little volume of discourses which was to preserve his spirit for every succeeding generation of his daughters. In his hands the Life of the Counsels, the principle of the Three-fold Vow, is divested of its terrors; it seems indeed to become the inevitable consequence of a desire to imitate Our Lord, simply because He Himself possessed nothing, loved nothing, and willed nothing apart from His Heavenly Father. Yet S. François, while he seems to declare that the way of the Religious is not only wise but natural for the human soul, has the most vivid discernment for its difficulties. Twenty of his Discourses have been recorded, and there is not one among them that does not contain some token of his profound knowledge of the petty temptations and hidden miseries

that are especially the affliction of the devout. Although the quality of genial kindliness that was in him is always evident, he can be ruthless in letting daylight in on the dingy places where sin hides itself. The sins depicted in the discourses are the sins of Religious who maintain their Rule, but some of them are not unknown to the secular conscience. For instance, there is the discouragement that disguises itself as humility; it is a common weakness among devout women, but François de Sales will not tolerate it. "Our distress at being so imperfect does not spring from our love of God," he says, "but from our love of ourselves."[1] "We need not be anxious about what we feel or do not feel, as the greater part of our feelings are merely the fancies of self-love."[2] "All our anxiety as to whether we have or have not made any spiritual advance is not pleasing to God, and its object is only the satisfaction of our own self-esteem."[3] "The less pleasure we are able to take in ourselves the more we should labour to show our faithfulness to God."[4]

He never deviates from this principle; indeed, in his regard, minute self-scrutiny was as insidious an evil as self-love, and as great a hindrance to the soul that is seeking after God; nor has it any link to the true humility which does not express itself in self-depreciation because it is too deeply-seated, too pervading, to need expression. The false tendencies that he denounces betray themselves unfailingly in Confession, even though they may be securely hidden at all other times, and François de Sales was the most enlightened of Confessors. His experience was far-reaching; persons of both sexes and of every degree besought his help in vast numbers, and his penetration seems to have been unfailing. Frequently he told his penitents that their declaration of sin was not complete, and many were constrained to see as through his vision that which

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. vi., Entretien ii.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* Entretien vii. [4] *Ibid.*

they had never discovered in themselves till then. "As a rule no concealment was possible with him," said Mme. de Chantal,[1] and it is evident that the way of penitence, with its special difficulties for the Religious, could find no clearer exposition than from his lips.

"You have four great opportunities of failure in Confession," he told the nuns at Annecy, "the first is its use for outpouring instead of its being a duty towards God; it is so pleasant to feel one has explained everything and has mentioned the faults of others to make it all clearer! This is the way in which so many sins are committed in Confession. The second is when one tells one's Confessor a great history dressed up in admirable language with long digressions whose sole purpose is to impress him with the idea that one is highly spiritual, and such exaggeration of faults that great and small are confused and he cannot discover the real condition of the soul. The third failure is the use of such secrecy and pretence that self-accusation gives place to elaborate explanations intended to hide the real nature of the offence. If it is done intentionally this is very dangerous. The fourth is the deliberate exaggeration of a fault, representing it as great when it is small. All these failures are serious. I would have you go forward simply and truly, purely for God, with a real loathing of sin and an absolute determination to overcome it."[2]

These warnings were not given idly; François de Sales knew the nature of his listeners and the weaknesses to which they were most liable, and all his knowledge did not hinder him in his belief that the highest ideal was not too high to set before them.

"The Sisters of the Visitation are all summoned to strive after absolute perfection," he says, "and their attempt is the highest and the most sublime that can be pictured, for they are not content with submitting to the Will of God

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iii., Deposition pour Canonisation.

[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," Entretien xv.

which is the duty of all His creatures; rather they aspire to be at one with His Wishes, to fulfil what He intends almost before He reveals it. Therefore their devotion requires to be as deep and generous as possible—this we have laid down very often. And besides what we have said of the need of generosity we must add this also: that the generous soul will accept dryness as readily as sweetness, and inward trial and anxiety and weariness as though they were the favours enjoyed by a tranquil spirit. This is so because she knows that He who sends consolations is the same as He who sends distress, that both are prompted by the same Love, of which she realises the immensity, and that It strives to draw her by inward spiritual suffering to that high perfection which surrenders all claim on consolation while this life endures."[1]

With that standard it was indeed needful that all pettiness and self-deception should be hunted out and exterminated. For the same standard must be held by all; the Sisters of the Visitation must have all things in common; they must be so steeped in the spirit of their Rule that one will not desire to excel another; their great advance must be made as one body.

That was the ideal. No one possessed a keener appreciation of it than did la Mère de Chantal, but the rapid increase in the number of the Foundations filled her with alarm. To the twelve Monasteries existing at the death of S. François twenty-two were added during the next seven years; many of them were at a great distance, and it was impossible to be sure that the Superior would have discrimination for the difficult task of choosing among those who desired admission. (In this connection it is interesting to turn to one of his discourses in which the Founder drew, in a few sentences, a graphic picture of the young person who is so meek and so devout in her visits to the Convent, and whose real propensities never show themselves

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," Entretien v.

until she is accepted ![1]) Bearing as she did the responsibility for the welfare of the Order, and the reputation of its Founder which was so bound up with it, la Mère de Chantal needed faith if she was to look towards the future calmly. But the greatness of the demand called out the powers on which S. François had relied. It was because she was able to grasp the immense difficulties of her task that, from the moment when his death was made known to her, the guidance of the Visitation became her absorbing thought.

Clearly then it was not a broken-hearted mourner who knelt by the coffin in the Convent chapel at Annecy, but a courageous woman whose heart beat high with the inspiration of a great resolve.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," Entretien xvii.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEGACY OF RULERSHIP.

"You seem to be present with me, my dear daughter, with your great heart which loves and wills so strongly. I have no fault to find with it, for what is the good of the heart that is only half alive? But once every week we must make a special effort to desire and to love the Will of God more deeply. I go further: we must desire It more intensely, more lovingly than anything else in the world, and this not only in occurrences that are easy to endure but in those that seem the most unendurable." [1]

Thus, in 1607, did the Bishop of Geneva write from the Castle of Sales to Mme. la Baronne de Chantal, and when, after more than fifteen years, she collected and re-read his letters, the words, echoing from a distant past, must have struck her strangely. For indeed the occurrence that seemed the most unendurable had come to pass, and yet, by reason of those special efforts that had been made much oftener than once a week, her heart retained its peace although it had capacity to love and will as strongly as before. In truth she needed all the fortitude and vigour that he had recognised in her, and her old power as a woman of affairs had as full an opportunity of exercise as in her years of widowhood. The disaster of December, 1622, was a staggering blow to lovers of the Visitation; but the darkest of their forebodings would not have seemed exaggerated to la Mère de Chantal, for only she could know how much that was needed to consolidate the Order remained

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 418.

undone, and the degree to which its Founder's reliance on guidance by the spirit rather than the letter became a source of danger, when the solution of difficult problems could no longer be referred to his personal decision.

She was swift in reviewing the weakness of the position and in determining on the remedy. First the Rule must be maintained in its integrity, and in this she gave an immediate object lesson. The Founder had laid down that in each House the election of the Superior was to be triennial, and no Superior might retain her office longer than six years. Exception had been made in the case of Annecy where the election had been merely formal; but at Whitsuntide, 1623, la Mère de Chantal resigned all her authority, and took the lowest place among the Sisters according to the Rule for the deposed. The Community were quite unprepared, and the Mother (though the step must have been the outcome of most serious reflection) took evident pleasure in the sensation it produced. "I wish I had time," she wrote to la Mère de Blonay at Lyons, "to tell you how I surprised our Sisters into deposing me. I said nothing to them beforehand, and they expected merely to carry out the election. Never was there such astonishment and commotion, but I paid no heed to it and adhered to the Rule. They held a council of which I knew nothing, and agreed that they had made a great mistake, and when it came to the election they announced that they did not accept my deposition and elected me Superior in perpetuity. I, who had been told nothing of all this, was amazed when the Bishop gave it out. I accept the Office—not as perpetual—but according to the Rule. Afterwards I tried to show them where they were at fault, but it was impossible to persuade them that they were so. Instead they were remorseful at not having prevented me in the first instance, saying that I was not like other Superiors, that I was this, that, and the other—a variety of nonsense! That Monseigneur

had never intended me to be deposed, only re-elected, that other Houses would claim me as Superior which they would never allow. In fact, if I had been their Foundress or some eminent personage they could not have said more!"[1]

Her growing experience of the difficulty of enforcing obedience unless every law was fixed, had dictated this sensational assertion of the importance of the Rule, and she had good reason to be thankful that she had set an example on a point where the Rule was repeatedly challenged. Her next measure was more elaborate and demanded longer preparation. François de Sales translated the Rule of St. Augustine into French for the benefit of the Community, and had himself drawn up their Constitutions, but these last avoided detail and left ample scope for diversity in small customs. As a result the practices in the different Convents were by no means identical, and the true idea of a life in common was imperilled. Yet in the first years at Annecy the Founder had declared his will on every little question as it arose, and his intention in every matter of importance was known to the little band that had gathered there. It was plain to la Mère de Chantal that practices were growing up which were not in accordance with his wishes, but she would not assume a right to alter them by her own authority. Instead she conceived the idea of reassembling the original Sisters—scattered far and wide among new Foundations—that the memories they held in common might be recorded, and the "Little Customs" of the Order fixed by mutual agreement for all time.

This was no small undertaking, for travelling was difficult and costly and was only permitted to a nun in a case of real necessity, but the plan was not mooted until its originator was certain that it was essential to the future well-being of the Order, and then she would allow nothing

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 459.

to deter her from carrying it out. Their meeting was to be in the summer, but from the beginning of the year (1624) her letters are full of it, and the eagerness of her anticipations of this gathering of her old companions suggests the loneliness of her position at Annecy. It took place immediately after Whitsuntide, and the importance of its result justified her insistence on it. The "Book of Customs," drawn up from notes and recollections of the sayings of the Founder, was carefully considered and sanctioned by twelve representative Sisters of the Visitation. It was afterwards submitted to the Bishops in whose dioceses the Order was established, and thenceforward provided an infallible guide on every detail of the Rule to those who desired to obey it faithfully.

At the close of their labours the assembled Sisters visited the tomb of François de Sales, and the first Superior of the Visitation laid upon it the book wherein was written the fruit of their deliberations. Then kneeling down they prayed that they might not be permitted to establish anything that was contrary to his intention for their Order.

The simplicity of this last scene is very characteristic of la Mère de Chantal. We can picture the happiness it held for her, and realising that happiness, we may guess at the sharp pain that succeeded when she discovered that she was alone in her intense devotion to Annecy and its hallowed memories. Part of her joy in looking forward to this gathering had been the thought that the daughters of the Mother-House would taste again the delight of its unsullied atmosphere. "It must be good for them to come," she had written, "if it were only that they might see the state in which our beloved Father left this Monastery of Nessy."[1]

To her it was always the fountain-head of the true spirit of the Order, and she knew that it was so regarded by the Founder. By his will the final appeal in any question of intimate importance was to be made to Annecy. "Though

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 532.

it is but a little town it is here that God allowed the Visitation to come into being, and though no authority is held here, the other Houses must always regard it as their mother."[1] That had been his intention, and when to that tradition was added the sacred distinction of possessing the tomb of S. François, it seemed to her that its position of supreme privilege was above dispute.

But it does not appear that the daughters of Annecy, when their vocation called them to other fields, shared in the ardent loyalty of the first Superior. Paris and Lyons and Marseilles were more important places, and they appeared so to the eyes of the Religious established in them. As soon as the object of their stay in the quiet Convent by the lake was accomplished, the travellers were eager to return, each one to her own field of labour.

Marie Aimée de Blonay, Superior at Lyons, had not been able to join the gathering, and to her la Mère de Chantal disclosed the soreness of her heart. "Truly I am a little sad because our good Sisters were in such haste to leave, when they were so long upon the road, but God allows that it should be so. Nevertheless I think it is useful to stay in Annecy, for indeed, my dear daughter, this House has a peculiar blessing on it. One may feel that our Blessed Founder has really left his spirit here."[2]

If Annecy was to be what the Founders hoped—the training school of Superiors and novice-mistresses—the special beauty of the life there would permeate all the branches of the Order. The spirit of disobedience and disloyalty grew so swiftly, if the human element was allowed any entrance, that it was essential to imbue all those who might be called upon to rule with the single-minded independence of the world's opinion that had characterised François de Sales.

"Ah, if it had only pleased God to leave him with us for another six years!"[3] In spite of all her resignation

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 706.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 559. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 566.

that cry was wrung from la Mère de Chantal by the pressure of events. It seemed indeed as if the world had not had time to understand what he meant by the Visitation, or to realise him enough to hold his ordinances regarding it as sacred. In those first years of her loneliness so many of the attacks, which she had to meet and repel at the cost of vital energy, had no reasonable motive. At Grenoble, where the Visitation had been planted under ideal conditions by the Saint himself, a situation that threatened real disaster sprang up only a little while after his death. La Mère de Châtel, their original Superior, completed the six years of Office that the Rule allowed. Her presence in the town was greatly valued, and the Community was mainly composed of daughters of local families. At the election she was re-elected, and not only secular but also ecclesiastical authority opposed her refusal to retain Office. There could not be any room for question as to the course that loyalty demanded of her, and as she was a most faithful daughter of the Visitation she remained obedient to her Rule. Following directions received from Annecy she went to Aix in Provence to found another House, but at Grenoble she left a state of anger and perturbation, both within and without the Convent walls, which accorded ill with the suggestions of charity and peace that should rightly be connected with a Foundation of Contemplatives.

No material loss could have caused such distress to the Superior at Annecy. If Grenoble, which in times past had been so highly favoured and had so large a share in the personal ministrations of S. François, could turn rebel on so slight a provocation, there seemed little hope of stability anywhere. But she gave new proof of the virile quality of mind, which was the bulwark of the Visitation in those unsettled years, by not yielding to the temptation of hasty interference. With the knowledge that affairs at Grenoble were going wrong she waited in the hope that other hands than hers might set them right, and although the hope was

not justified the patience that dictated it saved the situation. Several months after her irregular re-election at Grenoble when la Mère de Châtel had long been in Office at Aix ecclesiastical authority persisted in regarding her as still in possession of her first charge. The situation of the nuns at Grenoble was unenviable; human obstinacy was an ingredient in the combination of forces that was threatening the reality of their lives, and there seemed no prospect of deliverance. La Mère de Chantal waited until she judged that the most self-opinated of her adversaries would welcome the chance of escape from a dilemma he had brought upon himself, and then, without giving time for anticipation or discussion of her visit,[1] she appeared in person at Grenoble, and soothed and managed ruffled spirits with so much dexterity that all cause of dispute evaporated, and the long deferred election of a legitimate Superior took place.

It is hard to say whether these new Foundations suffered most from disloyal friends or open enemies. When opposition was declared and the interests involved were outward and material, la Mère de Chantal was disposed to accept loss and humiliation rather than risk a contest. In this she followed the example of François de Sales rather than her own natural impulses and there were some occasions when her own instinct would have been a surer guide. Those who desired to keep the Visitation with its high standard of devout living, out of their neighbourhood, did not hesitate to resort to calumny. There was an instance in the town of Riom in 1623 where an uproar was raised against la Mère de Bréchard, and her life was supposed to be endangered by the mob. The time-honoured legends that have been used so often to prejudice the ignorant against the Religious Life were disinterred for her discomfiture and the worthy magistrates of Riom convinced themselves that dangerous influences would be let loose and the peace

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 583.

of quiet homes in jeopardy, if a Convent of the new Order was established within their city walls. It may have been the absurdity of the charges brought against her that roused the fighting spirit in la Mère de Bréchard; in any case it is certain that she, who had been the meekest of the first group of Sisters, resisted all the directions for withdrawal [1] that came to her from Annecy and held her ground until by force of sheer tenacity she imposed respect for the Visitation on the citizens of Riom, and after nearly a year of struggle the new Foundation was solemnly established.

But it must be remembered that, while the contest lasted, the Superior at Annecy bore the burden of the most intimate anxiety. It was impossible for her to obtain full information of the exact conditions, but she knew that the Sisters who had been invited to establish a new House could find no fitting shelter, and were rejected in every quarter where they tried to settle. In the midst of such a hotbed of hostility as Riom had proved itself to be, there was hourly danger of some grave scandal, infinitely difficult to disprove, arising, to the prejudice of the Visitation as a whole. No personal labour or perplexity can be conceived which could make demands on faith as great as did these months of impotent uncertainty.

This incident, moreover, was only one among many, and la Mère de Chantal was not of those who rely on Divine intervention to cancel the direct consequences of imprudence. She knew as each little band went forth from the parent-house to break new ground, that she was hazarding afresh the high record of the Order, and that there was no limit to the havoc that might be wrought by the follies of an individual. And no reliance could be placed in moral character and spiritual attainment. In the novitiate and afterwards in strict observance of the Rule, a Sister might give proof of a real vocation as a daughter of S. François, and be selected to represent the Order in some distant city,

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 496 (Oct. 1623).

but, once there and out of reach of prudent counsels, her zeal would urge her to increase the numbers of the Community as rapidly as possible, and she would convince herself that faith and the spirit of S. François would transform the most unlikely subjects into devout Religious.

"The welfare of a House does not depend upon the number but upon the goodness of its inmates," wrote la Mère de Chantal in despair. "This desire for large numbers is really a disease. When a new House opens it is filled with every one that can be got hold of, and afterwards the really worthy cannot gain admission. And so each new family is ruined. Is it not a crime to smother an infant at its birth!"[1] Such energetic protests were effective, and it may be seen by her Correspondence that the other Superiors consulted her over doubtful vocations. But as the years went on she learnt to rely on personal influence rather than vehement language to control the vagaries of her Sisters. She learnt also to distinguish the capacity for rulership. The House at Bourges which she had established with so much labour risked complete extinction because she left its government in the hands of an incapable Superior. Anne Marie Rosset was an ideal Religious, and her life at Annecy showed all the beauty of a fulfilled vocation; she was qualified to uphold the spirit of the Order in a new Foundation by the mere fact of her presence, but quite unsuited to give actual guidance to others. François de Sales was the first to bear testimony to her failure. When he left Paris in November, 1610, he passed through Bourges and in a few graphic lines pictured the conditions that prevailed there.

"I found poor little Mère Rosset so weighed down and frail in health that I think her burden should be withdrawn from her. She is a dove that is far more suited to abide with her Beloved *in the cleft of a rock* of a Convent cell than to hold intercourse with mankind. Every one

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 329.

admires her character and very few respect her judgment. But, my dear Mother, there is nothing astonishing in this: it is not every soul that is permitted to be at once active and passive, and to pass from one state to the other without injuring either."[1]

La Mère Rosset was in continual distress, as this kind friend discovered when he questioned her, over the criticism which her stupidity in worldly matters was exciting, and over her own weakness in admitting unfit aspirants to the novitiate. The diffidence resulting from her innumerable mistakes had reached such a point that she would never speak to any secular person without the support of the Assistant Superior, lest they might refer to some business matter and she should fall into some further blunder.[2]

It was plain that no Convent could prosper with a Superior so entirely devoid of dignity, and even François de Sales was powerless to inspire his submissive daughter to the self-assertion of which she was incapable. But readjustments of authority were difficult, and Bourges continued for a long time to suffer from the ill-advised selection made by la Mère de Chantal, and in the midst of pressing affairs and questions of real importance, the timid futilities of la Mère Rosset must have made severe demand on the patience of her chief. To strong natures the attitude of deploring failure without attempting to avoid it is inconceivable, and nervous anxiety regarding the opinions of others is plainly incompatible with the capacity for leadership. But the outpourings of the poor little Superior at Bourges were a revelation of the possible feebleness of the devout and in that aspect were instructive.

La Mère Rosset was in despair because one of her nuns complained of the food provided for her. She is told to make discreet inquiry as to any ground for complaint, and then to go calmly on her way declaring it to be merely a

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1565.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1560.

temptation to which the complainant was a victim, and to ignore idle tittle-tattle on the subject.[1] Again her heart was wrung by the distress of a novice whose unruliness delayed her profession. She is told that such impatience bodes ill for the future. "Monseigneur said the last word on this question: *If she is a true Religious she will not be disturbed by waiting*, she is made to wait to prove whether she is humble and submissive, she will only show that she is so if she acknowledges that she deserves to be delayed."[2] In addition to these constant applications to her own Superior she had made appeal for advice in other directions, but her feelings are outraged because she hears it is common talk that she cannot stand alone. "It cannot matter very much that it should be said of you that you do nothing without the Carmelite Mother," wrote la Mère de Chantal healthily, "but do be careful, my daughter, not to use so many words in speaking and in writing; you should never multiply phrases that all mean the same thing."[3]

This was all very well when only ten Convents existed and the same number of Superiors demanded advice and sympathy, but with the rapid increase of Foundations it became clear that only the competent could safely hold the reins of government, the strength of a Community must depend on the principles instilled into all its members; it cannot remain permanently dependent on one master-mind.

"It is our great good fortune that we need no help from outside," wrote the first Superior of the Visitation. "We are so fully supplied with the teaching of Monseigneur that it is hard to imagine any question which is not provided for in his 'Entretiens'."[4]

But Ste. Chantal could not estimate the full extent of their good fortune. The personal instructions of S. François had been a precious gift to the Order, but they held besides another treasure, prized as highly, in the

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 312.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 241. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 317. [4] *Ibid.* Lett. 337.

familiar teaching she herself had given them. In the hours of recreation it was their custom to ply her with questions that bore upon their common life. As she gathered experience of the dangers and temptations likely to assail them, it became her solemn purpose to communicate to them that spirit of the Visitation which had come to be the reason of her being. There were some lessons that could be learnt from her which no Director, however wise or skilful, could impart, and this resolve of hers bore richer fruit for the Community than she could dream of. The Sisters at Annecy were not indifferent to their privileges; they noted, secretly, instructions that were intended for the passing moment, and only when a mass of material had been collected did they reveal its existence to its real author. Her period of Office had by that time expired and la Mère Favre held authority. She exercised it to procure the revision of the manuscript, and in this way the real mind of la Mère de Chantal has been preserved to us.

"Consider this, my daughters. 'Our Blessed Founder said that our entry into Religion was incomplete unless we knew why we were in it, what was our aim, and what was our intention.' Your intention in coming to the Visitation should be union with God and Separation from yourself and from the world. The Fathers of the Church say truly that when you have left the world behind you have already gone three parts of the way, because a great deal, certainly, is accomplished when you have quitted the world and your possessions and your family to withdraw into the Cloister; but the remaining quarter is not of less importance than the three others, but of greater.

"All those who would be true Religious must be emptied of themselves, must tear off every covering, must allow themselves to be crushed by others; for the Visitation is a little plot of ground wherein those who do not die to

themselves will never bear fruit worthy of their vocation. And your vocation binds you so strictly to strive after the highest perfection that I would say this to you, my Sisters: 'The Soul that does not seek perfection seeks perdition'. Weigh that saying well, for it is the simple truth.

"If there is anyone who lacks the courage to seek perfection whole-heartedly and give up being slack and uncertain I pray that God may direct her return to the world. Here she can do no good either to herself or to Religion; for myself I would rather be frozen as a worldling than lukewarm as a Religious.

"I have a maxim for you, my daughters, which cannot be disputed. It is impossible that you should reach Heaven, and therefore impossible that you should be saved unless you do violence to yourselves. Our Lord has said it Himself: *The violent take it by force.* I remind you of it that you may stamp upon your hearts an absolute resolve never to spare yourselves, but to conquer and crush out self in all things, that you may be at one with your Rule at whatever cost to your natural desires. Yet you must be gentle in your violence, for, as you know, my daughters, our spirit, though it is resolute, is one of tenderness.

"Listen to me, my dear daughters. You must give no quarter, you must slay. The spirit of the world and of the flesh cannot combine with the spirit of Religion, one must be conquered to gain the other. You must give up all your natural affections, your own judgment, your own will. These are the three things that it is hardest to give up, and the three that are most essential. You must yield yourselves so completely into the hands of those who direct you that they can twist you as they will, as they might twist a handkerchief." [1]

These are the words of a Superior speaking to novices and professed. There was not one among her listeners who had not heard the call of the Religious Vocation, but

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. ii., Instructions.

always there were some who doubted, some to whom its full demand was in excess of their intended offering. But la Mère de Chantal, while she regarded the rejection of the Religious Vocation as a sin against the light, did not ignore the reality of a vocation to the world. In her view the call to Religion came direct from God, and was a miracle of grace. Those who received it were in honour bound to strive after perfection, and any backward glance at the joys the world had promised was dire disloyalty. And if some of those who came asking for admission came idly, if the Visitation had made some merely transient appeal to emotional natures, it was their coming that was an offence to one who held all that concerned the Visitation sacred, their withdrawal did not seem to her to be a sin. It was the class that has been the curse of all monastic orders in all times at which she hurled her most vigorous protests and denunciations, the class of those who bring conventionality into Religion; who profess the whole faith with all that it entails and yet have no perception of its marvels; who can use the phrases of self-surrender but resent any disturbance of the calm routine that they have chosen. When she taught that none of the sins and follies into which a woman in the world outside might be betrayed were so dangerous as the tepidness of a professed Religious, la Mère de Chantal was expressing her profound conviction. "We must not be content to do no harm. I do beseech you, let it be evident that your hearts are burning with the love of God."[1]

That was her vision. The Visitation in each new city where it might be set was to be as a furnace of love and adoration. By the concentration of the hidden lives within the cloister walls on the supreme duty of a human soul towards its Maker, the world outside was to be touched to realisation of its own shortcoming; and, if for a moment we endeavour to make her vision ours, we shall see that no

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. ii., Instructions (10).

vehemence was out of place, no labour was excessive, if by its means she could succeed in purging the Visitation of any tendency to be conventional or lukewarm.

At Annecy she had about forty listeners, and teaching confined to so small an audience was not ostensibly of great importance. But Sisters from Annecy were proved to be the best leaders for new Foundations, and in those days of its rapid growth, the stability of the new Order depended on the training of its Superiors. La Mère de Chantal gave full recognition to this point: "All our Sisters must be taught to mortify their inclinations, but this is specially needful for those who seem to have capacity for Office. You must train them to real self-immolation, to the surrender of all self-interest and self-seeking; for I can assure you, my daughter, these are the chief source of the shortcomings of those who govern. It is therefore essential for any success to be really detached, and to go forward as before God in all sincerity."[1]

That is the verdict of deep experience. The letters that went out from Annecy to the Superiors of the new Convents contain ample evidence of the ravages wrought by the "self-interest and self-seeking" of those who governed. "In very truth," wrote the Mother, as she reviewed the state of the new Houses from which so much had been expected, "if we continue to make fresh Foundations with Sisters who are lacking in humility, who shrink from Poverty and are devoid of the spirit of the Order, we shall only have shells for Religion and not Houses of the Visitation; for no one can instil into others what they do not possess themselves."[2]

These gleanings from the warnings and laments, of which Ste. Chantal's letters are so full, suffice to show the long series of disappointments which she was called to face. And in fact the burden she took up at the death of François de Sales was heavy enough to tax mere human resolution

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1755. [2] *Ibid.* vol. vi., Lett. 1111.

beyond bearing, for great and incalculable forces seemed to be ranged against her; and the strain of anxiety was a hundredfold the greater because it was not only her own life-work that hung in the balance, the failure of the Visitation could not fail to cast a shadow on the memory of its Founder.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREASON AT MOULINS.

THE Visitation was known to those who came into intimate touch with it as making very severe demands on fortitude: "We should never take any notice of it," wrote la Mère de Chantal, "when we find a soul dismayed by the difficulty of our way of life. For indeed I have never known one so well schooled as not to be disturbed by the outward aspect of its absolute submission."[1]

This became more and more true as the Members of the Congregation gained fuller knowledge of the meaning of the Rule and the aims of the Founder; the demand was for self-immolation, and no attempt was made to hide or soften it; the penances and hardships were comparatively light, but the interior sacrifice that was exacted had no limit. It is strange, in view of this, that there should have been—even during the lifetime of the Founder—persons who desired entrance and yet had no desire to conform to the spirit that it represented; the fact of their existence is beyond dispute but it was incredible to him, and consequently the most weighty and complicated difficulty that assailed the Visitation in its opening period was the result of his trustful and generous view of human nature. One of the episodes in question acted as an additional discipline to the Superior at Annecy in those hard years when she was learning the art of government, and her patience in enduring it must be attributed to its direct connection with the ministrations of S. François.

In June, 1619, when la Mère de Chantal and the Bishop of

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 355.

Geneva were both in Paris a difficult case was confided to his care, that of Marie-Aimée de Morville, dame de Tertre, a lady who was using the independence of her widowhood in a manner that injured her reputation.[1] Popular opinion attributed a miraculous power of influence to François de Sales, and the anxious relatives of Mme. de Tertre appealed to him to accomplish what seemed humanly to be impossible. They desired that she should accept restraint voluntarily, but the manner of her life did not encourage hope that she would do so. She had reached the age of twenty-two; she was rich and incurably frivolous. It may be admitted, therefore, that only to the eyes of faith was there prospect of any good result from an appeal to her conscience and moral principles.

François de Sales did not approach the affair with any lack of caution. It is clear that he and the Superior of the Visitation discussed it carefully, but once he had embarked on the mission of saving this lost sheep he spared no pains and shirked no risk for its accomplishment. The plan proposed by the Morville family was to bring Marie-Aimée into close touch with the new House in Paris as Foundress, and the money she could have supplied was sorely needed; but one interview was sufficient to reveal to S. François that the atmosphere of Paris must choke any good resolutions at which the culprit might arrive, and the good of occasional communication with himself or la Mère de Chantal could not counterbalance the evil of braving continual temptation. Moreover, the scandal attaching to her was likely to be injurious to a Congregation in its infancy, and for herself the chance of a new beginning seemed to depend on new surroundings.

Accordingly, in the July following her introduction to S. François, Marie-Aimée de Morville yielded to his advice, and, heralded by warm recommendations to la Mère de Bréchard, left Paris for Moulins.

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1523, *note* 3.

"She is a lady of quality and will pay amply," wrote la Mère de Chantal. "Have a little room made ready for her and a comfortable bed, all very nice."[1] She represents her as being "passionately desirous" of retirement with the Order, and François de Sales, describing her at very much greater length, suggests that the vocation of the Religious is latent in her and that "she wishes to seek this grace in surroundings where it seems most likely that God may bestow it on her". The darker side of her history is to be recounted by her own lips, and she is prepared to accept all the restrictions of Convent rule and forgo letters and visits in obedience to the Superior. "She is weary of doing as she likes," he says, "and longs for the control of a kindly hand. And there is in her some root of goodness that makes me hope she may prove herself, one day, to be a true servant of God."[2]

If the future had unveiled itself before them would these generous hearts have made a different choice? That is a problem impossible to solve. François de Sales was consistent with his invariable principle of classing every soul he touched by the highest capacity that he detected in it. But to explain the impression that he received of her it must be remembered that, when he came into her life, Mme. de Tertre was in a desperate dilemma. Her family, indignant at the disgrace she brought upon them, were threatening to place her under forcible restraint, and she was alarmed at the result of her own folly and at enmity with all her world. And François de Sales, although he could be severe in his training of a Sister of the Visitation, especially if she showed unusual promise, is always and pre-eminently the gentle Saint; for a wilful girl, whose undeveloped conscience had failed to save her from the misery of open sin, he had nothing but tenderness. A mood that was half fear and half rebellion melted into willing

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 196.

[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xviii., Lett. 1537.

submission at his approach, and it is likely that Marie-Aimée deceived herself into the idea that she would find contentment with the Sisters of the Visitation, and was sincere in the protestations of docility with which she began her life at Moulins.

The record of the ensuing months may be drawn from the letters of la Mère de Chantal. As was to be expected the quiet of a provincial Convent became unbearably irksome to a lady who had enjoyed the dissipations of Paris. François de Sales was not in reach, and the good resolutions of Mme. de Tertre had no vitality apart from his personal influence; by September she was engaged, by means of secret correspondence, in imploring her old friends to deliver her from the bondage to which her kinsfolk had condemned her. As secrecy was not easy to preserve in Paris, la Mère de Chantal speedily became cognisant of the enterprise, and she lost no time in warning the Superior at Moulins and urging on her the absolute necessity of maintaining discipline;[1] but it is clear from the tone of her letters that she was not astonished at the development of affairs. François de Sales, passing through Moulins, had recorded that Mme. de Tertre was satisfying her vanity with great effect, having her room carpeted and her bed hung with silk.[2] Moreover, she had not relinquished the small luxuries of the woman of the world; in the provincial Convent she was scented and powdered according to the fashion in vogue in the Place Royale;[3] she wrote on gilt-edged paper and had clung to the habits of her former life. S. François, satisfied with the fact of her retirement into good and safe surroundings, was indulgent towards a weakness which appeared to him to be of minor importance, but to the Superior under whose personal care she lived the situation was one of distracting difficulty. Urged on

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 211.

[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1560.

[3] *Ibid.* Lett. 1583.

by the wise and gentle letters that came to her from Paris, la Mère de Bréchard co-operated whole-heartedly in this curious mission to the soul of her unwilling guest, and before long had acquired an influence over her hardly secondary to that of François de Sales. But the Mother in Paris watched each new development with deep anxiety. Complicated interests were involved, the culprit and her misdoings were notorious, and to abandon the charge they had undertaken implied a confession of failure, of which the enemies of the Visitation would easily make capital. This was the worldly aspect and one which at that stage of their history it was not possible to ignore ; the spiritual one was less disturbing, because experience proves that the purest atmosphere and the most perfect guidance is powerless against a really rebellious soul.

The crisis of the early autumn passed, however, and in the winter Mme. de Tertre was vanquished by the affectionate persuasions of the Superior. She wrote long letters to the Bishop at Annecy and to the Mother in Paris, which testify that at the moment she was quite sincere in assuming the character of the penitent, for la Mère de Bréchard had gained complete possession of her heart and she was full of love and reverence for the Visitation. The response of François de Sales is characteristic in its warmth, but the letters from la Mère de Chantal are always more guarded ; her experience of frivolous womanhood was in part derived from ordinary intercourse in the world, and the incapacities of such a temperament as that of Marie-Aimée de Morville must have been known to her. Nevertheless she allowed herself to be swept by the current of events into agreement with a most imprudent measure.

A new House was desired at Nevers, and the Superior at Moulins was to be removed there to found it. Mme. de Tertre could not face the idea of separation, but her fervour had reached the point of desiring a place for herself in the Order. Even in that moment of enthusiasm it does not

appear that she contemplated accepting the lot of a true Sister of the Visitation, but pictured herself as holding the privilege of Foundress. This privilege was accorded to those who entered the novitiate of a new House which was founded by their wealth. The "Book of Customs of the Visitation" lays down that "the chief privilege of a Foundress in Religion is to be the most humble and submissive of all," but the Customs were only a tradition when Marie-Aimée de Morville made her plans for the future, and she was destined to do valuable service to the Congregation by teaching them the great necessity of caution in according privileges, and demonstrating that the trustful usages of François de Sales did not bear the test of contact with the world.

Her health was her excuse in stipulating for special exemptions from early rising, personal attendance in chapel, and for a general easing of Convent Rule, and these were readily accorded by S. François; but she went further and claimed that la Mère de Bréchard should always be her Superior, thus touching a vital point in religious discipline. She did not receive the definite refusal she deserved. Her Director was bent on saving her at all costs and this most unreasonable demand was partially conceded: he says plainly that no permanent pledge can be given, but for the time being she shall continue to enjoy the companionship in which she takes delight.[1] And la Mère de Chantal confirmed the promise: though she had closer knowledge of the difficulty likely to result she also was ready to humour a fatal weakness and to trust to the certainty of its evaporating in the warmth of veritable conversion. "When you have had years of experience of the Love of God," she writes, "your own wishes will uphold the Rule."[2]

There is an extraordinary simplicity in the behaviour of these two; they took each stage of a difficult episode singly

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1583.
[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 238.

and acted in it on a principle of faith; humanly they were culpably imprudent, but in eventual result their course of action, sincere and uncalculating as it was at every step, did effectual service to the fortunes of the Order. It is strange, however, that even then, when their knowledge of her was nearly a year old, they should not have detected that they were dealing with one of the tortuous natures that love intrigue for its own sake and cannot exist without excitement. Deprived of the possibility of amorous adventure Marie-Aimée de Morville was forced to utilise her great capacity for deception in other fields. That she might make her future position more assured she had secret dealings with secular authorities at Nevers even while she was attempting to bargain with François de Sales. She was sly without being skilful and she ventured on to very dangerous ground.

The story of her discomfiture gives us a curious glimpse at the manners of the time. Provincial towns seem to have maintained a constant rivalry, and it was easy to arouse most violent feeling by the suggestion of injury to local interests. In the case in point Mme. de Tertre, a guest in the Convent of the Visitation at Moulins, was discovered to be treating with a prominent citizen of Nevers for the foundation of another Convent, and further, la Mère de Bréchard was proposing to give up her place at Moulins in favour of this new Foundation. The wrath of the people of Moulins gathered volume as the tidings spread; the Governor of the province, M. de S. Geran, made cause with them, though he had been a warm supporter of the Visitation, and the outcry became so violent that it could not be ignored.

François de Sales observed, not without some show of reason, that he found it hard to understand why a person who had no obligation to stay in a certain place should be held to behave wrongfully in leaving it,[1] but the imputed

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1685.

wealth of Mme. de Tertre and the recognised virtue of la Mère de Bréchard determined their neighbours to oppose their departure at all costs, and the permission that had been sent from Annecy was cancelled that peace might be maintained.

But no sooner was it decided that la Mère de Bréchard and her charge were to remain in their original quarters than discontent found many voices in Nevers, and the premature engagement of Mme. de Tertre was disclosed. She had promised thirty thousand francs for the Foundation, and on the strength of her written pledge ten thousand francs had been spent on the purchase of a house. Here indeed there was some legitimate reason for resentment, and, even to François de Sales, the dilemma was disturbing, for it involved a question of honourable dealing.

La Mère de Chantal gave characteristic expression to her view of the relative value of the interests at stake. "Is it only a question of money," she wrote to one of the Moulins Magistrates who was a friend to the Order, "how can that signify? If Mme. de Tertre would prefer to give more to Moulins than to Nevers, in Heaven's name let her do so. Each of the Convents is equally dear to us. It was she who volunteered to give to Nevers." [1] There was imminent danger of legal proceedings and of gossip most injurious to the Visitation, and the real culprit had seized the moment of uncertainty as to which Convent claimed her presence to lodge away from either, and was revelling in the excitement of which she was the centre. Her tongue was given free exercise. "If only this dear lady would speak the actual truth," [2] was the protest of the Mother in Paris, as each fresh batch of news arrived, and at length when it became incontestable that the heroine of the drama enjoyed and encouraged the excitement she was causing, a letter was dispatched to her which put the position of the Order she was dishonouring sufficiently clearly:—

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 266. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 269.

"My very dear daughter," it ran, "if it is your wish to persist in your sacred intention of living entirely for God and among us, you must be prepared, if you please, to submit to Monseigneur de Genève and have confidence in him. As far as we are concerned we do not wish to have any contest or legal action; we would rather lose a hundred times as much as you are giving, for we regard peace with poverty as incomparably more precious than all the riches in the world with any disturbance.

"If then, my dear daughter, you hold to your intention, as I believe you will, let there be no more discussion now that you know the wishes and advice of Monseigneur de Genève; for our poor Sisters, in both Houses, are distressed by this constant talk of matters to which they are altogether unaccustomed. They prize peace above all things. I beseech you to let them have it."[1]

There can be little doubt that at this point la Mère de Chantal would have rejoiced at the withdrawal of Mme. de Tertre, but "Monseigneur de Genève" was more sanguine as to her future, and, possibly, had not given his complete attention to the nature of the conflagration of which she was the occasion. Accordingly, la Sœur Marie-Aimée de Morville was admitted to the Novitiate at Moulins that August (1620), and the Superior in Paris, making surrender of her private judgment, rejoiced over the event. For the moment the prospect gave excuse for hope; the business difficulty between the two Convents was adjusted, and François de Sales had found time to write letters of encouragement to the new novice so charming as to elicit the response of altered conduct. Once more he assumed that she would maintain herself on the highest level she had reached, and to prove his trust in her he permitted her Profession.

His experience of others and his great power in raising souls may have justified his decision, but his death at this

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 276.

point in her career destroyed all reasonable hope of safety for la Sœur Marie-Aimée. This particular reason for regret was crowded out of the thoughts of la Mère de Chantal by others far more poignant, but a reminder of it was not long delayed. In August, 1623, the Moulins Foundress had already begun to exceed her privileges so outrageously that remonstrance became necessary. At an earlier time when la Mère de Bréchard had been sorely tried by the vagaries of her wilful charge, François de Sales exhorted her to meditate on the chapter "On Patience" in his book on the "Devout Life".[1] The continuance of this practice would have had its uses for the successive Superiors at Moulins as well as for the Mother at Annecy. At best the discipline and order of the Convent would have been imperilled by the generosity with which S. François had accorded special privileges to la Sœur de Morville, but she exceeded them by claiming freedom of correspondence with the outside world which he had never sanctioned, and insisting on writing and receiving letters which were not inspected by the Superior. She was a Professed Religious of the Visitation, but she would not recognise the principle of obedience. That was the true root of difficulty, and at first she displayed an incapacity to understand the meaning of her vow rather than a deliberate intention to repudiate it. From the defiance of Rule with regard to letters she passed on to disregard of all enclosure.

"By what right does our dear Sister Marie-Aimée demand that so many visitors should enter one of our Convents,"[2] wrote the Mother from Annecy. If she had been able to deal personally with the problem it might never have taken such grave proportions, but it was hard to direct from a distance. In fact, Marie-Aimée used her powers of persuasion to induce the Bishop of Autun to

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1682.
[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 462.

give her latitude greatly in excess of anything S. François had permitted. She obtained his leave to receive her friends, and, as the Moulins Convent was not yet walled in, she proceeded to hold conversations over the garden fence. The Superior protested; Marie-Aimée represented herself to the Bishop as injured and oppressed, and spread damaging rumours about the interior management of the Convent. As there was no restriction on her communication with outsiders and her own sense of truth was indefinite, there was no limit to the damage she could do to the Community, and once more the Visitation became the chief topic for chatter in the town, and opinion was divided as to the relative merits of accuser and accused.

We know the reverence that the Visitation inspired among those who understood it, and can conjecture the corresponding horror with which the proceedings at Moulins were regarded. If François de Sales had been alive the danger of permanent injury to his beloved Congregation would not have been great, but it was not possible for the Mother—tied as she was by responsibilities at Annecy and hampered by her position as a Religious—to let in the light of justice on sordid complications in a provincial town hundreds of miles away. It may well be that as she read the communications from Moulins the sense of her desolation became more than ever poignant. "If it had but pleased God to spare our Blessed Founder to us for another six years."[1] That was the repeated lament of her inmost heart which no acts of resignation could silence.

But for the honour of the Visitation it was necessary to deal with the situation as it stood. Marie-Aimée reached a stage when she would not brook opposition. "Clearly the poor creature does not know what she is doing; she is so carried away by passion"[2]—that was the most charitable comment on her conduct from within Convent walls, but for the outsider the position of this culprit is not without a

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 566. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 474.

tragic aspect. She felt herself caught in bonds that checked her in every movement; she wanted laughter, admiration, gaity, all the distractions that are natural desires in the young. She had been frightened at the possible penalty of her levities in Paris, and afterwards excited at being the object of so much anxiety and care from the most celebrated of spiritual directors; for a time also her frivolous nature had been captured by the saintly qualities of the Visitation nun, Charlotte de Bréchard—it is easy to follow the process of cause and effect. But François de Sales was dead, and la Mère de Bréchard had gone to Riom, and Marie-Aimée had returned to her natural self. And her natural self, unfortunately, bore closer resemblance to that of Christine Austrain than to any other inmate of any Visitation Convent. "*Elle dit qu'elle ne peut vivre céans, que l'on n'y parle que de Dieu, dont elle est si ennuyée que quelque fois elle a envie de se désesperer.*"[1] Thus had la Mère de Chantal written of the wilful child whose presence had disturbed the peace of Annecy years before, but then there had always been the hope that a serving-man on a good horse might appear at the Convent gates and remove "la petite Austrain" to her home in Lyons; for Marie-Aimée there was no similar hope; she was a Professed Religious, she had chosen a path that led away from the pleasant things of life, and the compensations that it offered to others were meaningless to her. "Our Blessed Founder's counsel for such an occasion as this was to cut the knot and not to attempt to undo it"[2]—thus did the Mother write to her from Annecy. Nothing could be won save at the cost of violence, but she was assured of her reward if she would pay the price. The wisdom and tenderness of the letter reflect the spirit of François de Sales, but it was completely ineffective, for none of the rewards of self-abnegation had any attraction for Marie-Aimée; she needed other measures, and seeing it the Mother ceases to be gentle. "It is the

[1] See p. 120. [2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 475.

hardness of your heart that has involved you in this tangle, and also I think our excessive gentleness. If I was in reach I can assure you that I should bring you to submission, and see that you did not have the upper hand. I beg our Sister, your Superior, not to spare any of the humiliation that you need."[1] Perhaps if the letter that contained this paragraph had gone to Marie-Aimée at an earlier stage she might have realised at least the folly of her manner of offending, but she had gone too far, and a distorted pride would not allow her to submit. The Congregation would have returned the endowments received from her, and borne the money loss with thankfulness, for the sake of relief from her presence, but unless an open scandal made expulsion necessary the Mother felt herself bound to a responsibility undertaken by their Founder. She herself might have found the golden mean between patience and indulgence, but her representatives failed to do so. Year after year the tale of misery was repeated; Marie-Aimée dallied persistently with the outside world, and was on the borderland of open treason to her Order, until the only counsel the Mother can give concerning her is to "pray a great deal for her soul as she leaves the door wide open to the devil".[2]

There was no seclusion for the Moulins Sisters while the chattering tongue of Marie-Aimée prattled incessantly about them to the friends she entertained within the Convent, and for the rebel herself there was no satisfaction, for her demands increased with each concession. In 1629 she was allowed to build a separate house within the Convent precincts, and this was the culminating outrage on the spirit of the Visitation; any further question regarding her concerns expulsion, and the observant gossips of Moulins, who had watched and enjoyed the drama throughout its long-drawn course, must have predicted hopefully that the Convent would soon provide them with a new topic by the ejection of its celebrated Benefactress.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 485. [2] *Ibid.* vol. vi., Lett. 819.

They were not disappointed of their new sensation, but the nature of it defeated their foreknowledge. Early in the year 1632 Marie-Aimée de Morville had a dream so vivid that the soul in her, which had been deaf to the reiterated calls of so many saintly men and women, awoke at last. She had the experience of conversion, and she was dramatic in testifying to it. She demanded to go through a real novitiate, and when the time came for her renewed Profession desired that the townspeople of Moulins, who had been witnesses of her disloyalty and wilfulness, should witness her self-abasement; before the ceremony she made a public declaration of her offence against her Order, and tore up the Deed that had secured to her her privileges, petitioning only that she might be received as the lowliest among her sisters.

"The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force." That sentence (which was often interwoven in her teaching) had been used in bygone years by la Mère de Chantal in counsels to the novice Marie-Aimée; her charge to her on her conversion rings with the same thought; the tendency to be sensational and picturesque does not alarm her if only Marie-Aimée will be vigorous. "Do you remember, my daughter, that I warned you that there was no middle course. You must strive to be a perfect Religious or you will be a very bad one."[1]

It was a hard saying, and she must have remained intensely anxious as to the stability of this sensational conversion. But the test of it was mercifully short. After fifteen months of striving after the perfection of the Religious the troubled life of Marie-Aimée de Morville came to a peaceful end.

One point that emerges from this melancholy history must not be overlooked; the Visitation had not received the support of legitimate authority in the maintenance of its spirit. The Bishop of Autun had increased the diffi-

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 704.

culties of the Congregation by favouring the rebel, and by the Constitution of the Order drawn up by François de Sales, the Bishop was the official Superior of every Convent in his diocese. This was a principle of which the Founder had been tenacious, and his decision may well give cause for wonder, because any knowledge of historical and ecclesiastical conditions at the time shows very plainly that episcopal appointments were made without regard for merit. S. François did in fact place his Community at the mercy of the Bishop whatever his character might be. "More than half the trouble in our Houses proceeds from their Superiors," wrote la Mère de Chantal to a confidante after many years' experience, and the only possible explanation is the one most consistent with the nature of François de Sales. In his vision the Order, held together by a bond of love, was really independent of authority, and would not have any points of inward contest requiring a decision from without. "*Tout par amour, rien par force*"—that was to be the invariable spirit, and if that spirit failed the Visitation had better cease from being. His life ended too soon for him to learn for himself the need of providing against the delinquencies of individuals, and la Mère de Chantal was left to reconcile her loyalty to him and his intentions with her experiences of the inadequacy of the protectors into whose hands the Congregation in its scattered homes had been delivered.

Her loyalty and her faith were unconquerable and each assault on them left them the stronger. The difficulties at Moulins, which might be regarded as a proof that their Founder had been ill-advised in his provisions, did not appear to her in that aspect. She knew that the Congregation needed failures, and that the only triumph worthy of its ideals was to rise above the injuries of malignant tongues. In weak and desolate moments she might shudder before the possible events that loomed in the immediate future, but the true spirit in her was too deep to be disturbed by

any feminine dread of what may happen. Such a period of distraction as was endured by the Community at Moulins is, however, a fatal disturbance to the atmosphere demanded for the life of a Contemplative; if there had been great signs of growth there it would have witnessed against the necessity of hiddenness which was at the root of the practices of the Visitation. When from the same soil there sprang up new distresses the Mother realised that these provided an object-lesson which was a support and not an injury to the Order. But she may well have been weary of Moulins, and from thence there was still to come a sharper trial than any she had received from Marie-Aimée de Morville.

Even in her letters la Mère de Chantal gives so great an impression of power and of the most simple-minded sincerity that it is hard to understand how those who had personal touch with her could have remained indifferent to her influence. And it is harder still to understand how one who was bound to her by a natural tie of loyalty could have made her the object of deliberate deception. But, in fact, where she was most generous and trustful she found her trust betrayed. She had been a Religious for more than twenty years when this occurred, but the pain of the wound awoke all that was most deeply human in her nature. The circumstances may be related briefly. Marie Angelique de Bigny, Mother Superior at Moulins, followed the custom prevailing among the Mother Superiors of the Visitation, and wrote long and detailed letters to the Mother at Annecy. There was no gap in their correspondence, and la Mère de Chantal believed herself to be as well-informed of affairs at Moulins as at any other Convent. A sudden revelation came from another quarter. La Mère de Bigny had embarked upon a new Foundation of which she had made no mention; that alone was a covert insult to the authority tacitly recognised at Annecy, but it was one for which forgiveness might easily have been obtained if the tidings of her doings had not included more serious items. She

had gone to Bourbon to drink the waters for the benefit of her health, and it was said she had gone as a secular great lady might do, with considerable display, and in cheerful company (on this point reports conflict, but it was clear she had shown open contempt of the seclusion to which her vows had bound her).[1]

And the Mother wrote to her from Annecy:—

"My dear daughter, I cannot refrain from saying this—for it is my habit to be open. It is indeed remarkable that you, who have made such particular profession of your openness with me, have thought fit to take so many steps of the utmost importance to the Order without saying a word about them beforehand; as, for instance, your journey to Brittany, your other to the Baths, the Foundation for which you have already accepted two novices, of all which I heard nothing till the thing was done. I do not say this by way of insisting that I should be told what you do; but that you should see that I am not yet such a ninny as not to realise that you have asked my advice in little things to keep me unsuspecting, and in those of importance where my counsel might have been useful to you, you have done as you liked and asked me afterwards. You must forgive me, my dear daughter, for saying this; so long as I live I must speak plainly to all who belong to the Order; however they may take it I cannot do otherwise. It is not that I wish to set myself above you, but because I feel myself forced to take action."[2]

This was in 1634. La Mère de Chantal was an old woman; she had known many sorrows and had learnt to endure without visible flinching, and it is strange to see how sharply the manner of this offence affected her. Plainly it was the feint of confidence (which is assuredly the deadliest shaft that can be aimed at friendship) that pierced through the shield of her self-restraint and revealed her once again as a woman of the same fibre as other women,

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 820, *note*. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 821.

as sensitive to certain forms of pain, as ready to revolt at the dishonour of a broken trust.

Apart from the personal aspect the matter of the visit to the Baths at Bourbon was serious. "The Mother is a laughing-stock within and without the Convent. We have begged Monseigneur d'Autun to depose her, for it is a scandal wherever it is known."[1] That was the summary of the situation, and unless vigorous measures had been taken the damage to the Visitation might have become irreparable. There were some who urged that the panacea for every tribulation, a visit from the Mother at Annecy, should be tried at Moulins, but she herself treated the suggestion decisively. "I am absolutely resolved not to go while the Superior remains. I don't know if it is indolence or lack of courage, but I find myself hanging back from any interference in this business. I am, in fact, entirely disgusted."[2] So she wrote to la Mère de Blonay in September. A month later the offender was publicly deposed from her office at Moulins and sent to the Convent at Autun, and she made the best amends within her power by complete submission. It was characteristic of la Mère de Chantal that a wave of sympathy should sweep away all the bitterness that had possessed her, so that a letter of affectionate intimacy was despatched to her "very dear daughter" before she set out upon her journey.

Once again the story shows the strain and burden of her outward life and the immensity of its anxieties; and perhaps there is no stronger evidence conceivable of the force of self-restraint she maintained through every hour of every day, than this momentary collapse of fortitude and temper beneath a blow that struck her vitally. But, as we read the trenchant lines she penned to la Mère de Bigny, and turn from it to the long series of her letters that are as full of gentle kindliness as of wise counsels, we must perforce

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 836. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 839.

contrast the momentary revival of the natural woman who might still have been ruling the castle and estates at Montelon, with that other—the actual guide and ruler of the Visitation—whose work for others was made possible only by self-conquest.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHILDREN OF A SAINT.

The life of Ste. Chantal as a Religious Superior was so vigorous that it is impossible to regard it as a divided life; but it should always be remembered that she was not able to put away the cares and anxieties of the past when she entered her Convent. To a woman of such deep and absorbing affections it had been no light matter to relegate her motherhood to a second place. Where her daughters were concerned no separation had been necessary, but she must have foreseen the risk of a division of far greater import than that which is imposed by space. The mother of Celse-Bénigne and Françoise, as she weighed her great renunciation before she made it, must have realised that the passage of the years would take them far away from her. Every pious mother is confronted with the same possibility, but it came to her in an extreme form. The first Religious of the Order of the Visitation could not extend the same indulgent sympathy to the pleasure-loving weaknesses of youth as a great lady living in the world might do; nor could she share in the ambitions and desires that appear all-important when life is opening, because she never relaxed the standard that her vows bound her to maintain, and the prizes of the world, in her eyes, were really without value. And to Celse-Bénigne and Françoise these prizes were desirable. They disagreed with their mother, and therefore, behind the immense personal affection that always bound them to her, there was the sense that her advice must be discounted, because on certain points

her opinion was a foregone conclusion. That being so they concealed from her the wish or action that they knew she would condemn, and real confidence was not possible.

The barrier was greatest where Celse-Bénigne was concerned, and it was with relation to him that she had most to suffer. Her marriage had been a very happy one; the memories of her youth were sacred, and he was her first-born and her only son. There was real love between them. His attempt to bar her way when she was leaving Dijon was not a boyish trick, but an expression of passionate revolt against a decision he was not able to understand. In after years it is likely that her heart was sometimes torn by misgivings when she thought of him. He was, it is evident, dangerously charming, and he had no one near him who was competent to control or even influence him. Annecy was very far from Paris, and in a mother's heart there remains a natural instinct of belief that her presence can protect from danger even when every other force has failed. When the threatening dangers are spiritual rather than material, and the mother is dedicated to God's service, such a conviction would be deepened to the point of anguish.

In 1617, when Celse-Bénigne was twenty-one, Marie Aimée, the eldest sister, died in her mother's arms. Marie Aimée was united to her mother by the closest bonds of sympathy. It had been her marriage to Louis de Sales that brought Mme. de Chantal from Burgundy to Savoy, and made the founding of the first House at Annecy possible. During her happy married life she had been guided by François de Sales in the practices of devotion that might be followed outside the Convent walls; and in her widowhood she had developed so marked a vocation to Religion that she was allowed to make her Profession on her death-bed. Every circumstance seemed to combine to make the pain of her loss more poignant, yet her mother states distinctly that the grief which Celse-Bénigne was causing was so much harder to bear that the death of this beloved

daughter seemed as a benefit compared to it.[1] In writing of him she implied that his salvation was in jeopardy; she used the language of despair, and only sudden illness prevented her from hastening to Paris. The after-career of Celse-Bénigne suggests that his mother exaggerated the nature of his evil courses; and indeed the distance that divided the Convent at Annecy from the Court of Louis XIII was of a kind that cannot be reckoned in leagues, and she was unable to realise how impossible it was for her to see the boy's conduct and conditions in their true proportions. But he showed her how far he was from the depravity with which he was accredited by his response when she begged him to come to her at Annecy. He was well aware that her judgment of his misdoings was not lenient, and that she would not be chary in expressing it. Nevertheless, in the spring following the climax of her great distress about him, he came to see her. She had urged him to come, no doubt, but she could not force him, and the journey to Annecy was a long one.

For both the anticipation of their first meeting, after long separation, in the austere surroundings of the Convent Parlour must have been clouded by misgivings. Celse-Bénigne lodged in the little town and two or three of his friends from France came to keep him company. When we consider the nature and object of his expedition, this fact is strong testimony to his popularity, for Annecy was not a gay resort, and la Mère de Chantal and the Bishop of Geneva were neither of them in sympathy with the life of the Court or of Paris. He must have known them both well enough, however, to know that if he was in their reach he had no real defence against them. A letter of his mother's suggests that when he came to her first he brought his friends with him. "Yesterday we could only have general conversation; to-day I must show him what he has become. My very dear Father, say Mass with this in-

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 126.

tention that God may help me and may touch his heart." She depends also on the wise influence that has meant so much to herself, and desires that it should reach his comrades also; but she was terribly anxious by reason of her knowledge of his nature. "I ought to tell you that it is the boy's way to conceal his real self from all those to whom he should look up. But I am sure he will become more open before he leaves us."[1]

As she looked forward to his coming the mother could allow herself to dream. The chance of his life seemed to her to be awaiting Celse-Bénigne in the renewed intercourse with François de Sales, and it was easy—on her knees in the Convent Chapel—to believe in the certainty of a spiritual miracle. But when the boy himself, with his friends round him, stood before her; when she realised his charm, his brilliancy—and perhaps for a moment loosed her hold upon herself, and with a mother's intuition saw life with his eyes, and remembered many things that once to her also had been vivid—then the greatness of the miracle for which she looked revealed itself, and her hopes faltered. Perhaps there came to her new knowledge of the supernatural in her own development, and of the impossibility of forcing on his boyish spirit that sense of the vanity of earthly joys which was a part of her vocation. She was confronted with a problem presented to many a devout mother, but the form it took for her was extraordinarily intense. Her son had exceptional advantages from the world's point of view; to her they appeared as exceptional temptations, and her standard was harder to modify than that of others.

But if her position arouses pity no less so does that of Celse-Bénigne. He loved his mother with an honest natural love; it was pain to him to grieve her, yet it seemed impossible ever to avoid doing so. The world for him was a pleasant place, where one did as other people

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., p. 132.

did and ran certain risks of killing and being killed, because the code a gentleman must follow required it. The course of life required of him certain things which his mother classed as sinful but which appeared to him as necessary, and it was hard to accept that either she or even the Bishop of Geneva (who could not possibly know much of a gentleman's life in Paris) were competent to judge for him. What wonder if he decided not to tell them more than was absolutely necessary, and to leave Annecy behind as soon as he could do so without wounding her?

So in due course he rode away, leaving her sad and unsatisfied, and her only comforting resource is to beseech the prayers of the most prayerful of the Community. Continual reference to him in her letters shows that he remains present to her always, despite the gulf of circumstances dividing them. "I suffer on account of my son as sharply as a mother can suffer," she wrote to Mme. de la Fléchère; "when we meet I can explain this to you. He is at Court; I am told he is very gay and very splendid, and resolved to get on and make his fortune."[1]

That was not the resolve she wanted him to make, but for one of his age and condition it was a natural one. Where fashion and public opinion drove him, there it was to be expected that he would go. Yet a very few weeks later there is a mysterious reference that strikes a different note. "I am told that my son has taken the bit between his teeth and that God seems to be helping him." The mother who is also the Religious grasps at a hope she hardly dares to cherish, and uses the privilege of her position to further it. She implores the Sisters, at hand and at a distance, to pray hard and pray perseveringly for her son. "Let those who are nearest to God make it their special business. He is good and has good impulses, but his youth carries him away. I believe Our Lord is preparing

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 180.

him for some heavy cross; may he be given grace to accept it rightly."[1]

As we read, we see the vision of the praying nun, trained by the sacrifice of life to realise that God is present with her, and that she may lay a special need before Him; we see her kneeling, head bent and hands tight clasped, all her will concentrated in her petition that Celse-Bénigne may be preserved from evil. And, far away in Paris, the young courtier, all unconscious of her, risked deadly harm to soul and body daily, and emerged without injury. The picture is not barren of suggestion.

In 1623 Celse-Bénigne married Marie de Coulanges and the sharpest torment of anxiety from which his mother suffered was over. Four years later he was killed, fighting very bravely at La Rochelle, but he had prepared for death as his mother would have desired, and that is her ruling thought when she first hears the news.

It had been difficult to preserve the detachment of the Religious while so many natural and spiritual fears centred upon him, but it was the mind of the Religious that was in the ascendant when she wrote to his widow, for her leading thought was the remembrance of "how many times he nearly threw away his chance of eternal life. And now God in His infinite goodness has permitted him so splendid and holy a death that we have every reason to believe he has passed into endless felicity."[2]

In spite of her brave words, however, it is quite clear that, in that year 1627, Ste. Chantal had not yet attained to the supreme detachment which would have made joyous resignation the note of every reference to her bereavement. Indeed, it may be doubted if she ever did attain to that condition, for it did not accord with certain qualities that were a part of her individuality; and there is another letter that reveals her in a more human and a more familiar aspect. "God's Will has been done concerning this son

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 195. [2] *Ibid.* vol. vi., Lett. 808.

who was so dear to me. Blessed be His eternal loving-kindness which has tempered the bitterness of the cup with such great mercy that I find in it a summons to give thanks rather than to mourn. I say this according to the spiritual view, but nature cries out sharply at the loss of such a son, for whom my heart had special love—and with good reason." [1]

Schooled as she was in devotion and in sorrow she had touched a new test and a new experience with the tidings of that death in action. It was something outside and unlike the sacrifice of the nun, with every aspect of which she was so familiar; yet the sacrifice that Celse-Bénigne had made was no less veritable. And to her own heart he stood for the pride of life. She thrilled again with the glow of those valiant deeds a woman may not emulate, and it may be that, as she wrote, her thoughts rushed back over thirty years to the time when her first-born lay in her arms, when her heart was full of the natural joys of the wife and mother, loving and beloved, and the mystery of her vocation was completely hidden from her. His death severed the last strong link with the past, crushed out, perhaps, the last vestige of human pride, and the pain of it was not to be ignored. "Nature cries out sharply at the loss of such a son."

Yet for all this it remains true that she did not regard the ending of his earthly life with unmixed pain. When the young widow died a few years later she writes that she cannot remember when a sudden sorrow has so overwhelmed her.[2] The little lady was gentle and devout, and she never caused any anxiety to those who loved her, but her personal touch with Ste. Chantal had been slight and infrequent. Nevertheless the grief for her was greater than the grief for Celse-Bénigne. That avowal betrays how overwhelm-

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 813.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. vii., Lett. 1258.

ing had been the burden of misgivings which crushed the mother's heart during his reckless lifetime.[1]

There is less tragedy but perhaps not less of vigorous human interest in the relations between Françoise de Chantal and her mother. She was the second daughter; the memory of the youngest was hallowed by an early death, and Marie Aimée, the child-bride, never gave much anxiety. The first introduction to Françoise reveals her as frankly naughty. Her mother's retirement from the world did not subject her to any unusual conditions. She was approaching the age when it would have been natural to send her for Convent training, and probably she received more indulgence from the Sisters at Annecy than she would have done elsewhere. Her mother, having watched her from her babyhood, had no illusions as to her character. She was vain and pleasure-loving and needed severity. Every facility for moral growth was offered her; she breathed the spiritual atmosphere of the Community in its earliest and purest days, and she had the privilege of training by François de Sales. Nevertheless she was unruly. In a letter from her mother in 1615, S. François is taken to task for his lack of firmness with her, she "has not been sufficiently mortified". There is a refreshing note of laughter in the remonstrance. "This, you see, is what always happens, a father spoils his daughter because he is too soft-hearted and too gentle and indulgent towards her."[2] And at another time a projected journey of her mother's is prevented because she is ill, but the illness is solely due to over-eating, and occurs always when the fruits she loves are ripe.

Françoise must have served, to any reflective mind among those who knew her, as a perpetual witness to the

[1] Chantal was the intimate friend of Chalais and of Bouteville, both of whom were beheaded; at the period of his death he had incurred the displeasure of Cardinal Richelieu (see Bussy-Rabutin, "Hist. de la Maison de Rabutin").

[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 39.

reality of a Religious Vocation. Other girls who had knowledge of the Community came to implore the favour of admission. In many places aspirants had to be kept waiting or refused for lack of room. But Françoise, for whom the door stood open, who would have been spared much of the suffering confronting others who cross that threshold, whose self-offering would have meant incalculable happiness to the mother whom she loved, Françoise was unswervingly resolved to secure the pleasure and to brave the pain which the world held for her.

Perhaps it was well for Ste. Chantal that, until her death, she was kept in intimate touch with the stormy experiences besetting a life lived in the world. The accepted point of view of the Religious may very easily raise a barrier which the ordinary human being of undeveloped spiritual capacity cannot penetrate. The worldling and the nun are so far beings of a different race that they have no meeting-ground unless the one is craving what the other has to give. But Françoise, with inherited directness of purpose, refused to allow the sympathy she needed to escape her. She had sense to appreciate the value of her mother's wisdom as well as of her love. She acknowledged—and may sometimes have deplored—her saintliness, and she succeeded in drawing down that soaring vision to the mundane matters that concerned herself. Except during a brief period when she was the prey of a great sorrow, it is open to question whether Françoise was ever under her mother's influence. When quite a young girl she rejected the husband chosen for her, and showed so much decision in doing so that the next opportunity of settling her in life was revealed to her with the utmost caution. Ste. Chantal was in Paris, in the midst of the pressing cares that attended the establishing of a new Foundation, and Françoise was staying with her relations at Dijon. It is curious to contrast the letters of the Superior, advising or directing

a Sister in the Community, with those of the mother exhorting her wayward girl. The proposed bridegroom is eligible in every way, but Françoise is quite capable of setting her affections on some one else or of refusing her mother's choice from pure caprice. Celse-Bénigne was sent from Paris to act as advocate on behalf of M. de Toulonjon, who had asked his sister's hand in marriage; but he bore with him a long letter from his mother which betrays in every line the fever of anxiety in which it must have been written.

"Say nothing of all this to anyone, but pray over it and send me your reply as quickly as possible. Do so without fail. It would be better to send two letters by different routes. I will send to meet the coach in a fortnight. I do entreat you let me have your answer.

"I shall see that everything is settled for your advantage. Do not be anxious about anything, my very dear child." [1]

The problem of Françoise had baffled even her mother's skill in direction. She could not be kept by force within Convent walls and outside them there was no real authority over her. The alliance with M. de Toulonjon offered worldly advantages, but probably the circumstance that appealed most to his prospective mother-in-law was his age. He was fifteen years older than Françoise and his record was untarnished. He seemed capable of ruling as well as loving her, but, if such an idea had occurred to her, there would have been no further hope of an alliance between them. For this reason, no doubt, there is no reference to his age in the first letter, but the second announces a visit from him (probably premature in the judgment of onlookers, but he was an eager lover) and the fact can no longer be concealed.

"Behold here is M. de Toulonjon, my dear child. Finding he had eight or ten days free he is posting off to be assured

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 233.

by you yourself—so he says—that you don't think him too gloomy-looking; he does not think you will find anything to object to in his temper. For my own part, I tell you honestly that not only do I find nothing to object to in him, but I find nothing more to be desired. I care less about the wealth and position he offers us than for his wit, his gentleness, his straightforwardness, his wisdom, his character. Indeed, my sweet Françon, you should thank God for such a chance. But, my child, let your gratitude to God lead you to love Him and to serve Him better than you have ever done, and let nothing that can ever happen to you be a reason for neglecting the Sacraments or check your endeavour after humility and gentleness. Let the Counsels to Philothée be your guide, they will lead you right. Don't fix your mind on these idle wishes for rings and dresses: you are going to be wealthy, but, my dear child, never forget that we must make use of the wealth God gives us without prizing it; that must be our attitude towards everything the world cherishes. Henceforward it must be your aim to be noted for your prudence and modesty, and for the wisdom with which you fill the position that is to be yours.

"I must tell you how glad I am that your marriage has been arranged by me and others of your family without any effort on your part. It is the wise who allow themselves to be advised, and I should wish to have your confidence always, my dear child. Your brother also, who is a very good judge, is delighted at this match.

"M. de Toulonjon is about fifteen years older than you, it is true. But, my child, you will be much happier with him than you would be with some young scapegrace who was careless and dissipated as almost all the young men are nowadays. You are marrying a man who is above all that, who is no gambler, who has won honour both at Court and on the battlefield, and who holds high office from the King. You have not the good sense for which I have given

you credit if you do not receive him warmly. I do beseech you, my child, welcome him with a good grace."[1]

It is easy to smile over the letter (it is even conceivable that Françoise may have done so), but it is moving by reason of its lack of skill, of its transparent effort at diplomacy. It would seem that the young lady had shown an inclination to select a husband for herself, and her mother suspects her of romantic notions that at the eleventh hour may incline her to throw away her good fortune. The letter is intended to combine sympathy, persuasion, and mild authority, to make allowance for the fancies of girlhood, to represent all the inducements to obedience, to assert the value of experienced judgment. And there is not a line in it really calculated to affect the decision of a wayward girl. It is the production of the Religious striving to picture to herself the position of a vain and pleasure-loving nature before a decision of vital importance, that she may influence it in the right direction — and it fails pathetically of its purpose. There can be no doubt that Françoise, who had great good sense in all worldly matters, made up her mind at once that M. de Toulonjon's offer was not one to be refused. But if she had thought otherwise her mother's sweeping condemnation of the youth of the period would not have made her more tolerant of his maturity.

"I fear my daughter's irresponsibility," Ste. Chantal wrote to la Mère de Brechard while the question still hung in the balance, "it serves me as a thorn in the flesh."[2]

It must have needed a sharp effort to transfer herself from the preoccupations of her own daily life, from the difficult guiding and development of the settlement in Paris, which could only be rightly guided if every detail was considered on her knees, to questions of marriage portion and of trousseaux, and to that managing of a self-willed girl for which a worldly mother would have been far more competent. For as we have seen, the House in

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 233. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 224.

Paris was of infinite importance to the Community and a very small mistake might lead to far-reaching damage to reputation. It was not for herself and her Sisters that Ste. Chantal desired reverence, but for the spirit of the Visitation, subjected for the first time to the criticism of the world of Paris. And for her always the spirit of Visitation was the spirit of its Founder. Every thought that she had to divert from the supreme object of her life was given unwillingly at such a moment, and yet Françoise claimed a concentration of attention lest she might relapse into folly.

Fortunately M. de Toulonjon returned from Dijon "as delighted as it is possible to be," but intimate knowledge of the bride seems to have prevented confident jubilation. "Remember there must be no changing. If you should find any fears or fancies of whatever kind coming over you, you must guard yourself against them and not admit a single one on any pretext." That warning in a letter of approval and congratulation when the marriage has been acclaimed by friends and relatives, shows us that the guardianship of Françoise was no sinecure. A further passage written from within Convent walls, rings strangely.

"M. de Toulonjon is eager concerning rings for you and desires to bring most of the jewellery in Paris here that I may buy you whatever I wish. And it is my wish to buy you nothing, for I assure you it is really the truth, my dear child, that at this Court great ladies no longer wear them, they leave them to the city folk. Moreover, when you come here you could choose for yourself. But I cannot bring M. de Toulonjon to reason over it. He begs me that just for a beginning he may send you some pearls, some earrings, and a painted box set in diamonds. In faith! my dear child, M. de Toulonjon must not be allowed to buy all these things just as he would like, for he is so eager to please you in everything there is no end to it. If ever there was a really fortunate woman it is you, but you must see that prudence will have to be on your side and that you

must withstrain him in such things. It is far better to be a little careful and to spend money for some good purpose rather than on all these toys and vanities. For my own part truly I have not the very least desire to see my Françon carried away like that. Indeed it concerns me personally, for being my daughter you are bound to be specially discreet and modest in all your doings."

It was a moment when Françoise must have had special regret at her mother's vocation. What bride would not have chafed at the austere refusal of those proffered jewels? And she was further tried in the matter of apparel. M. de Toulonjon wished to order for her freely, but her mother proposed to control the choosing of her dress. "We will have it made in the present fashion and of materials which are being worn now and *will be wearable everywhere.* On no account must you have a wedding dress; the Court, in town and country, laughs at them. Moreover I am particularly anxious that you should be married very quietly and in this my wishes must be regarded." [1]

In June, 1620, three months after her first introduction to M. de Toulonjon, Françoise was married. We may conclude that her mother's anticipations and her own of the probable result of that event were diametrically opposed—otherwise it might never have taken place. To the mother it seemed as if her restive child would at length be under control; to Françoise herself marriage meant emancipation. It is plain that neither forecast was justified, indeed the relations between them were not appreciably altered. As a wife Françoise was not less inclined to extravagance than she had been as a girl,[2] and her husband, with laudable sagacity, seems to have controlled her expenditure through her mother. Paris, even at that period, was the centre for the choice of clothes, and the Superior of the Convent of the Visitation was made the agent for Mme. de Toulonjon's

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 243.

[2] In her old age Mme. de Toulonjon was notorious for parsimony.

purchases. It was not a congenial occupation, but it gave an occasional opening for warnings that were urgently needed.

"My very dear daughter, I am sending a complete dress which is as rich and fine as can be got. You should be more than content with such a magnificent dress as this, but you have been so set upon it that you are getting it. M. de Toulonjon writes that you have nothing to wear but what you have on. This has astonished me, because during the last seventeen months you have had four silk dresses besides the flowered one about which you wrote to me. My dear Françon, I ask you what do you expect me to think? In good faith, my child, be satisfied and show yourself the true daughter of a father and mother who were always reasonable and friendly and loyal to each other in their happy union. That is what I want you to be. Be brave, my daughter, and let there be no more of these childish fancies and absurdities, putting you into a fever about nothing."[1]

Truly this marriage did not do much to lessen anxiety concerning Françoise. It only served to make her mother's part in her life more important because more appreciated. The girl may have concealed her hopes and wishes for fear of interference, but the matron concealed nothing. She claimed her mother's sympathy and honestly desired her advice, though she reserved the right to ignore it if it did not accord with her own estimate of what was reasonable. Probably the gentleness and good temper which were noted as among M. de Toulonjon's advantages were needed to ensure the mutual happiness of the pair. In fact, Françoise possessed one of those natures which are hard to satisfy. The more life gave her the more she asked of it. "You care too much for the things of this world, you take them too much to heart," her mother writes despairingly. "Do listen to me, my dear daughter, and turn over a new leaf.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 353.

Put away vanity, serve God, live contentedly with him whom God has given you, devote yourself to the care of your household, be diligent in this and live in all things as befits a faithful mother of a family. If I had not made that resolve when I was first married we should not have had enough to live on, for our income was smaller than yours and we were fifteen thousand crowns in debt."[1]

The exhortation suggests certain deficiencies in Françoise. She was a matron of three years' standing when she received it, but apparently she had not developed those qualities which had made the chatelaine of Bourbilly a model to all housewives. Perhaps she made less effort because the standard set before her was so impossible of achievement; but for her peace of mind it was unfortunate that her bond of love to her mother was so strong. Other young wives could enjoy themselves, could buy rich clothes and flirt and chatter without any restriction save the fear of scandal, but for her there was always the uneasy remembrance of Annecy, and a consciousness, that may have been half resentful, of her mother's prayers.

The sorrows of life did not spare her. She lost two of her children, and later came the death of Celse-Bénigne to whom she was devoted. But she did not seek comfort in religion. It is not till 1631, nine years after her marriage, that we find a hint of any real conformity to her mother's lessons. Ste. Chantal grasps at hope with pathetic eagerness. Montelon was part of her daughter's dowry and there was a Convent of the Visitation at Autun. Françoise seems to have gone there to seek refuge from herself and her discontent. Her mother writes to the Jesuit Confessor urging him "not to spare her," with the same instinct that had prompted her remonstrance with S. François fifteen years earlier. (In her letters at this time the Mother Superior betrays a hope that little Gabrielle de Toulonjon may be inspired with a vocation for the Community, a suggestion

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. ii., Lett. 610.

that has peculiar irony when we remember Gabrielle's destiny as the wife of the notorious Bussy-Rabutin.)

There are at intervals these suggestions that Françoise is at last awakening to spiritual realities, but the poor little endeavours would have had more chance if they had been allowed to be more spontaneous. The joy of righteousness could never be a discovery, it was so constantly depicted to her, and it was a continual subject for astonishment to her mother that, in spite of the innumerable disappointments and distresses that fell to her lot, she should still set her affections on things of the earth.

"*Personne ne peut prier avant qu'estre esveillé*," wrote S. François de Sales,[1] but it was impossible for the mother to realise that all her teaching was completely ineffective unless her child was individually awakened, and perhaps her efforts delayed the hour and ma le it less impressive when it came. After eleven years of married life Françoise still required her mother's reiterated warning: "riches and dignities and the good things of this life are dazzling you".[2]

But the path of pleasantness ended abruptly and this favourite of fortune was required to learn her lesson. M. de Toulonjon died. He had protected and cared for her unceasingly, and his wealth and high office (he was Governor of Pignerol) surrounded her with the pomp and circumstance she loved. It was a sudden blow and her character was of the type that can grow sullen when oppressed by sorrow, but at that moment the remembrance of her mother brought comfort. She and her children sought a refuge at Annecy and for four months she turned her back upon the world.

Ste. Chantal may have been too lavish of exhortation in the years that were left behind, but it says much for her candid method that Françoise, knowing the uncompromising

[1] "Traité de l'Amour de Dieu," liv. ii., ch. xxi.
[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. iv., Lett. 1247.

counsels that awaited her, turned none the less to her mother in her hour of distress. And again we find the Religious claimed by a situation that does not accord with her vocation. In that long ago time in Paris, when she was summoned to the Convent Parlour to consider silks and jewels and the dictates of recent fashion, the claim was external and therefore less disturbing. But Françoise came to Annecy in the desolation of very real loneliness. She was no longer the child to be coaxed and admonished, but a woman demanding natural human response from the heart of that other woman who was her mother. It cannot be doubted that the demand was a difficult one to meet. Each year that passed had drawn Ste. Chantal further into a sphere that implies real detachment; she did not breathe the same atmosphere or speak the same language as this sad young widow who clung to her, with vigorous insistence on the close human tie that bound them to each other. Perhaps if the question had come earlier Ste. Chantal would not have had capacity to meet it. The rigorous quality which had given her courage to step across the boyish figure of Celse-Bénigne, barring her passage to the cloister, or, many years later, had attempted to rejoice over the violent death that ensured the safety of his soul, might have intervened in her dealing with the hapless Françoise. Her own standard could not easily be modified and her daughter's development had not been on lines of self-abnegation.

But, in fact, it is clear that she did not fail, and that her spiritual ascent had taught her to love more and also how to love, and, when Françoise left her, her letters are warm and sympathetic. "My child, no chance of writing to you shall be allowed to slip. You are so dear and so precious to me that it is a help to me if I may help you. I know you give me the love of your whole heart and truly I respond. There could be nothing in my power that I would not do to make you happier."

She trains a girl at Annecy, a certain Madeleine, as *dame de compagnie* for Mme. de Toulonjon, because she regrets her loneliness and lack of anyone with whom she can talk intimately. She does not hide her opinion that this world holds no loneliness for those who will seek Companionship where it awaits them, but she does not insist unduly on the thought. She has learnt at last that Françoise cannot grasp the facts that are so plain to her own vision.[1] Moreover when, after their separation, her daughter asks her for a written Rule of daily conduct, she does not suggest any severe tax on her resolution. All she prescribes is fifteen minutes of prayer morning and evening and half an hour of spiritual reading, a monthly Communion and a general desire to live watchfully.[2] There is evidence in this that the old zeal has given place to the wisdom that is taught by love.

There were further vicissitudes in their relations to each other and renewed doubts and anxieties. Françoise did not attain to any pinnacle, but, if she failed to realise the full glory of a devout life, she did not turn away her eyes from regarding it, and there is clear evidence that her devotion to her mother and desire for her presence was never deeper than in the last months before she lost her.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1338. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1312.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FAMILIAR FRIEND.

THE isolation of her post of government never taught Ste. Chantal the secret of real self-reliance or self-sufficiency. After the death of François de Sales she looked for support in the directions where she had legitimate claim on it—and failed to find it. Michel Favre, her Confessor, died; Bishop Jean de Sales revealed the weaknesses of his character when he succeeded to his brother's place and proved both peevish and domineering;[1] and la Mère Favre, first of the companions of *la Maison de la Galerie*, broke down completely beneath the burden of successive charges. Ste. Chantal, with all the weight of responsibility towards the Community resting on her and the constant tax of anxiety concerning her own children, was extraordinarily alone, and she was not of those who welcome solitude. She sought relief in a friendship of her own choosing, and for a time her need seemed to be fulfilled, but ultimately that which she chose for solace turned to suffering.

The unfolding of her life suggests that this was needful. A nature such as hers, instinct with strong affections, could not fulfil the vocation to which God called her without the schooling of privation. Had she been encircled by the sheltering love of those who could give her complete loyalty and understanding no burden of toil or difficulty would have seemed too heavy, and the record of her nineteen years of government would be a record of happy labour. But instead those nineteen years were memorable for frequent periods of utter desolation, through which she

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1369.

was led forward step by step in the progress of her complete self-offering. And it should be remembered that Jeanne de Chantal had none of the characteristics of the anchorite; she hungered for the delights of sympathetic human intercourse and was qualified to enjoy them fully. It is her triumph that she could seize denial and use it, looking above her deprivation instead of brooding on it.

Marie-Aimée de Blonay, the chosen confidante of her Superior, was the most gifted of the first generation of the Visitation Sisters; she was also marked for close sympathy with Jeanne de Chantal by her special devotion to François de Sales. Her father was a gentleman of Savoy who was ordained priest after the death of his wife but continued to live on his estates surrounded by his numerous family, of which Marie-Aimée was the youngest. She grew up therefore as the daughter of a priest, and probably her outlook was affected by this curious condition. François de Sales was a frequent guest at her home, and, when she was sent away to be educated, the Convent chosen for her was within easy reach of Annecy. In very early years she cherished the wish for the Religious Life and she fixed on the Monastery of S. Claire d'Evian as the scene of her dedication. François de Sales was the first confidant of this resolution. She was invited to stay with Mme. de Charmoisy in Annecy in the Christmas season of 1608 to hear him and to meet him, and she chose this occasion to open her heart to him. She was the merest schoolgirl, not more than sixteen, and he a heavily burdened Bishop in the midst of a course of sermons in his cathedral town, but it is plain that he lavished time and thought upon her, and, having heard her and questioned her, decided that her real vocation was for that Order, not yet in being, on which his thoughts had centred for so long. The delight with which he wrote to Mme. de Chantal of this interview has a ring of triumph.

"Courage, my daughter, God desires to aid us in our plans; He is preparing special souls for us. Mlle. de Blonay, of whom I have spoken to you, has told me of her wish for the Religious Life. She is marked out by God for the Congregation. Already I feel her to be yours and mine." [1] "When you know her you will realise how much you will love her, and I have never been more mistaken if God has not designed her for some great purpose and one of great advantage to our plans." [2]

That was the position which she held in the esteem of S. François; no one was more transparent than he in dealing with those whom he admired, and Marie-Aimée regarded him with the deepest reverence and had entire confidence in his judgment. It may be well, in considering her and her after relations with la Mère de Chantal, to remember the terms in which he made her known to her future Superior, for undoubtedly his attitude towards her then was responsible for much of her development later. The difficulties that in one form or another always impede entrance into the Religious Life could not be evaded by Mlle. de Blonay. Her father resented her withdrawal as bitterly as if he had been the most worldly of laymen; she was very attractive and he wished her to marry and to remain within his reach for the comfort of his old age. And when his opposition was overcome other events delayed her. It was not until January, 1612, that she sought admission to *la Maison de la Galerie*. She was welcomed very warmly by it rulers and on the day of her reception to the novitiate various gifts were bestowed upon her. S. François gave her the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of S. Matthew's Gospel which he had had copied for her (the 4th she had already copied for herself), la Mère de Chantal gave her the Constitutions of

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 500.

[2] "Vie de la Mère M. A. de Blonay," Charles Auguste de Sales, ch. xii. (edition 1654).

the new Order written by her own hand, Charlotte de Bréchard gave her a scourge, and Peronne de Châtel a hair-shirt. On that day, as her friend and biographer expresses it, "we see her provided with everything that was necessary for her endeavour towards perfection".[1]

La Mère de Chantal studied her in the novitiate as she studied every novice in those early days. She was predisposed in her favour, but she seems to have been aware of the self-scrutiny which was one of her prominent characteristics. S. François himself was not oblivious of it. Marie-Aimée was deeply interested in her own dreams and inclined to attach supernatural significance to incidents in her own life which were, to say the least, susceptible to normal explanation. In one such instance, when she was recovering from an illness, he sent her a message to the effect that it would be better not to dwell so closely on a recent vision but endeavour to use her returning health of body and spirit for the glory and the service of God. She was to remember that the true mark of supernatural grace was humility and inward faithfulness.[2] It was her good fortune that she was drawn to the Visitation; under other guidance that which was unhealthy in her temperament might have been developed at the cost of the great qualities which made her of such value to her Order.

In the first years she was a source of undiluted happiness to the two Founders. They gave its full value to the solid excellence of the devoted women who formed the nucleus of the Congregation, but it is evident that Marie-Aimée possessed the gift of personal charm and shared with her Mother Superior the quality of liveliness in which many of the Sisters were too plainly lacking. It was to her on the first expedition of the Community to Lyons that S. François entrusted the little notes that were to cheer the heart of their leader at the close of each day's journey;

[1] C. A. de Sales, "Vie," ch. v.

[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xvi., Lett. 915.

her nickname of *la chère cadette* suited the position; she was indeed as a favoured youngest daughter to them both.

But it was inevitable that time should change the simplicity of that first relationship. The journey to Lyons implied separation, for Marie-Aimée was to remain while la Mère de Chantal returned to Annecy. When the former became Novice Mistress in the new House her office brought her weaknesses into prominence; she was morbid herself, and she allowed her charges to be so, and the letters she received from Annecy are sometimes healthily critical. Nevertheless before very long she, as the only remaining representative of Annecy left in Lyons, became Superior; this was in 1622, and at the close of that year, as we know, François de Sales died there, within the Convent precincts. The night before his fatal seizure he had heard la Mère de Blonay in Confession; she was his last penitent and he gave her the same prolonged and intimate attention as in that long past Christmas season when she revealed her vocation. That which her Superior desired so passionately was given to her in fullest measure, and, indeed, although the future held a time of trial for la Mère de Blonay, experiences of pain and privation such as were lavished freely on la Mère de Chantal were not required of her.

There is extraordinary pathos in the devotion of la Mère de Chantal to this favourite daughter. The distance between Annecy and Lyons was so necessary a division that it would have been a very natural course of events if the two had slipped apart. Most of the Superiors of the new Houses needed continual counsel and support; affairs would have gone very wrong indeed without the letters which conveyed to them the decisions of the Mother at Annecy. But this was not the case with la Mère de Blonay. A difficult situation arose while she was still young in experience as well as in years. The successor of Archbishop de Marquemont, Charles de Miron, showed the same autocratic tendencies, and imposed a Confessor on the Community at

Lyons in open disregard of their Constitutions. The Mother Superior did not feel it necessary to send messengers post-haste to Annecy; she was competent to deal with the situation on her own initiative and she did so with a prudence and courage that justified the predictions of S. François. Her attitude towards the new Archbishop was one of profound deference, but she refused to obey a decree that set aside the Rule of her Order and the intention of its Founder. The Archbishop had power to depose her and he did so. Undismayed by that apprehension of unknown consequences which is so apt to hamper a woman's actions she persisted in her defiance, but she was gentle in her expression of it, and, although justice was plainly on her side and what she was suffering was persecution, she made no personal protest. Finally her calm adherence to a principle impressed the Archbishop, and he reinstated her, conceded the point under dispute, and became one of the warmest of her admirers. The incident proved that la Mère de Blonay could stand alone: and, as the burden of application from Branch Houses and the letter-writing consequent upon them weighed very heavily on the Mother at Annecy, she might thenceforward have spared herself where Lyons was concerned. Instead we find that this is just the direction where she writes most constantly and desires voluminous replies. She is quite open in declaring it to be so.

"I do entreat you not to check yourself in writing to me; it is my great comfort. No matter how hurried I may be I must always open your letters directly they come. No one else shares this privilege. The blessing of God is on the love and confidence between us two."[1]

She had continual reminders of the weakness of those who held authority and she found strength almost equal to her own in la Mère de Blonay; that may seem to account for the need of her she expressed so vehemently, but the true reason has far deeper root. Marie-Aimée was perhaps

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 631.

the most beloved of the spiritual children of S. François ; she was the last to have close touch with him, and Jeanne de Chantal, who thought of him constantly as regarding her from heavenly places, was certain that a close communion of spirit between herself and *la chère cadette* would be what he would wish. The personal charm, the vivid intellect, the great capacity for government with which the object of her attachment was endowed, were all hallowed and glorified by the sense that François de Sales had watched each of these qualities developing, and had regarded them as the treasures of the Visitation. La Mère de Chantal schooled herself to detachment and indifference in all other directions, but she gave rein to her devotion to Marie-Aimée because of the share he had in it. And so it happened that, yielding unwittingly to the instinct of her nature, Jeanne de Chantal prepared for herself a further portion of human suffering—and used it when it came for her own perfecting.

During the first decade after the death of S. François there were many letters of affectionate intimacy written from Annecy to the members of the original group who had been called far and wide for the new Foundations. La Mère de Chantal wrote warmly and characteristically, and her correspondents could feel themselves in close touch with the parent house, but it is impossible, nevertheless, to ignore the difference between her letters to the Superior at Lyons and to the rest. In the one case she takes up her pen with the plain intention of finding solace from the disappointments and anxieties that oppress her; in the others she is imparting news, advice, and sympathy. Her preparation for the gathering of the original sisters at Annecy[1] throws light upon her attitude towards them ; she can accept the hindrances to the coming of this and that Superior with philosophy, but the presence of la Mère de Blonay—which in fact was not to be allowed her—is absolutely essential.

[1] See ch. xii.

"As for you, my very dear daughter, you must be so absolutely resolved to come that only the Hand of God will withhold you. I implore you not to let man have power to do so." [1]

We have seen the disappointment that had so large a part in la Mère de Chantal's after-recollections of that gathering. Annecy itself had not the hold upon its daughters that she had expected, and not one of them had wished to linger with her. The confidante of these regrets was Marie-Aimée, for she, being detained at Lyons, was exempt from all reproach; yet, in the light of after events, a doubt arises whether the hindrance to her coming would have proved insuperable if she had been firmly resolved to come. It is shown plainly by the letters that she grew accustomed to the enthusiasm of love that exhaled from them, and was sensitive to the least breath of disapproval.[2] She sent full and detailed records to Annecy of her affairs at Lyons, but she did so knowing the certain generosity of the response; again and again decisions are left to her with an expression of confidence that her wisdom will decide aright, and the innate humility of the writer deepens the value of the praise. "Love me very much, my very dear daughter, but do not flatter me nor admire anything that I do. And when you find anything unfitting in my letters, please do not fail to tell me so plainly; and pray for her whom God has made completely yours." [3]

It was thus that Jeanne de Chantal wrote to Marie-Aimée de Blonay; there is no insistence on her leadership; their alliance was to be one of mutual help and she is herself frankly grateful for honest criticism. But her frankness was destined to be the stumbling-block to the smooth progress of their relations; her letters tell the tale. In the autumn of 1625 la Mère de Blonay sent her one of those intimate chronicles of her spiritual state which devout souls

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 549.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 567. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 577.

were accustomed to compile from time to time. La Mère de Chantal had deep experience of direction; she regarded the conditions set forth fairly and comments on them in good faith. Marie-Aimée has seen her faults and described them very well—so she writes admiringly—it is evident that she is too inquisitive about the Sisters and about the affairs of other Houses; she lets her zeal run away with her, and that is an old weakness which has been pointed out to her before. Also she seems to desire her own family to excel any other in virtue and that is an offence against the spirit of the Community. And then there comes a tender comment on deeper and more intimate revelations: "I hardly know how to reconcile what you say, my daughter, of your lack of light or joy or conscious response, with the child-like confidence of your approach to Our Lord and your absorbing desire for God and sense of gratitude to Him for the grace of your vocation. For it is impossible, my daughter, to be as you are without great spiritual light."

Deep admiration underlies these musings; Marie-Aimée had been highly favoured and in her anxieties about herself was missing the content that lay within her reach; the sentences are not susceptible to any interpretation other than this, and the letter conveys the pleasure that the writing of it has given to the writer: "It is a consolation to me to be talking to you; I am doing it at length as if I had nothing else in the world to do".[1]

It aroused a different sentiment in its recipient; anger rather than consolation animated la Mère de Blonay as she read; and she did not scruple to express it. La Mère de Chantal with nothing but tenderness in her heart was utterly amazed.

"If you re-read my letter I think you will see that I did not intend to charge you with untruthfulness or exaggeration. Indeed, my very dear daughter, I do not connect you

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 668.

with such things nor with anything of the kind. Ah, do not fancy it! God has given me too clear a knowledge of your heart for that! If you knew mine in the same way you would not think this of me."[1]

It was hard on her that with her chosen friend she should have to parry accusations and misunderstandings. She needed a heart where she could rest, for the pressure of anxieties, both small and great, was ceaseless, and she had no energy or leisure for personal disputes and reconciliations. It may be, indeed, that it was this lack of leisure which prevented her from adjusting her relations with Marie-Aimée. Her great desire that *la chère cadette* should be actually what S. François had believed her to be caused her to silence any misgivings that might suggest themselves; and also, perhaps, her personal love intervened and would not let her face considerations that must shake her reliance on the friendship that was her chief delight. Certainly the generous confidence of her letters did not abate in consequence of this rebuff and she failed to take warning.

The next storm, incomparably greater in severity, did not break till two years later. It concerned the Visitation as a whole and it struck the more sharply on the Foundress because of the quarter from which it sprang. In those intervening years la Mère de Blonay had been displaying her genius for government and organisation; the company at Lyons prospered exceedingly; another Convent was founded there, proving the high esteem in which the first was held by the citizens; other Branch Houses were aided with funds and provided with good subjects, and the Sisters were united among themselves and hidden in their daily life in accordance with the ideal of S. François. La Mère de Chantal, pestered by the astonishing incompetency of so many Superiors, could turn to the thought of Lyons with relief, and add gratitude and admiration to that clinging love which her heart poured out on its Superior, and, as

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 678.

she considered the troubled waters through which it was her part to steer the Congregation, it was to Marie-Aimée that she looked to be her support and to take the helm if her hands became too feeble.

Nevertheless it was Marie-Aimée whose conduct—judged by the standard of the Mother House—brought the new Order to the verge of shipwreck. In connection with this episode two points are of importance. First: that the Visitation depended on the entire loyalty of its members. S. François had laid its whole foundation upon that idea; his Congregation was to need no central authority and was to be undisturbed by conflicting influences brought to bear upon it in its many and widely scattered homes, because it was its glory to maintain, under all conditions, the same Rule and the same spirit as had been accepted by the Sisters in the first Convent by the Lake. Secondly: that this position, which might not always have been recognised clearly by those who had joined in distant places and never known their Founder, must have been very vivid in the mind of Marie-Aimée de Blonay. By her own testimony, recorded in the life written by her friend and contemporary, Charles Auguste de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, the words following were among the last spoken to her by S. François: "My daughter, I have one thing more for your ear specially. If there should be a Convent of the Visitation which is not ready to look up to our little Annecy with eager reverence, and with the cordial love which will secure union, it will never itself be worthy to receive the glorious Child of lowly Bethlehem." [1]

It will be seen then that la Mère de Chantal had good reason for her belief that the intentions of the Founder were as sacred to Marie-Aimée as to herself. Now there had been one wish of his—embodied in a definite Rule—which was a cause of stumbling to many; it was that which provided for a triennial election and insisted that no

[1] C. A. de Sales, "Vie," ch. viii.

Superior should rule more than six years consecutively. In 1628 la Mère de Blonay had come to the end of her legitimate term of Office and the election took place. An account of it was sent to Annecy and the reply indicates what the account contained. The new Superior is approved and the letter continues—the eager individuality of the writer growing more vivid with every line: "But—O Saviour of the world!—what else is it that you tell me? That our Sisters desired to elect you again, that there was nothing they wished so much and that they came very near to doing so in spite of all you did to prevent it. Truly if I had heard that from anyone but you I should have found it very hard to believe. Is it possible! Our Sisters at Lyons could allow themselves such a thought! That is what pierces my heart with such anguish and forces tears from my eyes when I think of it. This House which was to uphold and preserve the Order in exact observance—this House is the first that would capsize it! And what has become of their conscience and their fear of God? Do they think they can defy the essentials of their Rule without offence to God? What has become of the love and reverence for their Founder of which we hear so many protestations if they propose to set at nought the most important of his commands? Is there anything which we have instilled more carefully than the necessity of unwavering faithfulness in preserving whatever has come to us from our Blessed Founder. Do they not know his warning to us that once we began to be lax we should begin to dissolve! I do not imagine they considered this, nor had any wrong intention, but that is where the harm they did would lead." [1]

A loyalty, which was passionate in intensity, to the spirit as well as to the letter of S. François' wishes animated Jeanne de Chantal; the upholding of his intentions for the Order seemed to her the chief reason of her being; she re-

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 859.

garded them as sacred, and expected those who shared her knowledge of them to share the sense of sacredness. It was in this that Marie-Aimée failed her; reverence for the spirit had been lacking. In the first shock of realisation she seized her pen and wrote the protest that, even by its vehemence, appeals for sympathy and for support. But a charge against Sisters implies a reflection on the conduct of the Superior, and Marie-Aimée could brook no strictures of that nature. Indignantly she laid the letter before Père Maillan, the Jesuit Confessor to the Community, who did not scruple to address a severe reprimand to the Superior at Annecy. The humility of la Mère de Chantal was tested sharply and it did not fail her. She deferred as always to the priestly Office and responded meekly to rebuke,[1] but she does not yield in the slightest regarding the just motive of her outburst. Her words were too bitter—so she acknowledges, and this indeed she had acknowledged almost at once, for a second missive had been despatched to Lyons on the heels of the first: "I should be distressed if what I wrote is seen by other eyes than yours, for I wrote to you yourself and on the spur of strong and just resentment".[2]

The excuse that what Marie-Aimée had said was said lightly seemed to her only to aggravate the offence. There was no graver danger to the stability of the Order than that of a light regard for the detail of its Rule; she does not swerve from that position, because the treasuring of the Rule was far more than a principle with her: it was as the mainspring of her daily life, her thoughts and actions were not separable from it. The revelation of a differing point of view in Marie-Aimée was a very heavy blow to la Mère de Chantal, but perhaps the sequel brought with it a shock of pain and disillusionment that was even harder to accept. What Marie-Aimée stood for to the Order meant very much, but what she was to the heart of its Foundress

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 867. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 860.

was something incommunicable; if the first letter was prompted by a white-heat of indignation the later ones seem to have been written through blinding tears.

"It was to you only that I was writing—as our old friendship and absolute confidence in each other gave me the right to do. Because of that I poured out my heart to you quite freely as I have always done, never dreaming that you would show my letter. . . . Ah, my dear daughter, why are you so resentful at what I said to you? I acknowledge that what I said was hard and violent, but truly it was not intended hardly. Do you not know my heart better than that and the place God made for you in it. Read my letter over again and you will see that I was mourning to you as to myself, not meaning to lay the blame on you. Indeed, my dear daughter, you must try and bear with this jealous eagerness of mine to preserve our poor little Order in its entirety. And if sometimes I go too far and slip into misdoing that is surely only to be expected of my weakness."[1]

This is not a paltry misunderstanding between two women, the one outspoken and impulsive, the other reserved and sensitive. The contrast of the two natures is indeed brought into relief so that conflict of some sort between them appears, sooner or later, to have been inevitable; but this particular cause of conflict was of far-reaching importance to them both. For years Marie-Aimée had been a centre of admiration, and she had grown accustomed unconsciously to share the opinion of herself that was held by others. She was a devout and prayerful soul and therefore must have been humble before God, but in her relations with her neighbours she was not so. The violence of her resentment shows that the criticism which aroused it made a deep impression, and it was a moment when she needed criticism. She had been nearly fourteen years at Lyons, and reverence for the spirit of Annecy had had time to

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 869.

grow dim, but the Visitation needed her great capacities, and her love for its Founder was deep and faithful. It was well that she should be summoned even against her will to consider what that love involved and—in the fear that it might again be challenged—to be scrupulous in external loyalty.

The incident held a reminder of quite another order for la Mère de Chantal. It may be that she had been misled by the tender thought she had cherished of the blessing from the past that rested on this friendship, and "that great heart which feels and wills so strongly" had once more cast strong tendrils round a human object, and, imperceptibly, had drawn it into occupation of too large a place. Disillusion in the midst of friendship brings in its train a desolation that is especially poignant for generous and trusting natures; it is plain from her own words that la Mère de Chantal suffered, but such suffering for her had its own possibility of sweetness. Eleven years divided her from the Whitsuntide Retreat that heralded so much new knowledge of the realities of sacrifice. Is it possible that, as week after week she poured out her heart to Marie-Aimée de Blonay and gave and asked for sympathy, the message that then shone out so clearly had grown a little dim?

"Our Lord loves you, my Mother; He requires that you should be His completely, that you should have no arms to support you but His only, that you should find no rest save in Him only. Your eyes must not wander from Him, your mind must be centred on Him alone."[1]

It had been a hard lesson, but she had learnt it bravely then and known the glory of it; to be brought face to face with it again was to know again that close touch of the Hand of God which brings Heaven down to earth for those who love Him.

[1] See ch. ix.

Frequent communication with la Mère de Blonay continued, but it was on a different and more wary footing, and the fourteen years of life that remained to Jeanne de Chantal did not contain another strong attachment. The despotic rule of the Lyons authorities continued to hinder personal intercourse between the Superior at Annecy and any of the Community at Lyons. There was a time when the Archbishop forbade any Convent in his diocese to receive la Mère de Chantal[1] and contrived to prevent the withdrawal of any of the Sisters. Any inquiry into the reason for his animus against the Foundress of an Order he extolled would be unprofitable, but its effects caused a good deal of distress at Annecy. The deposed Superior of Lyons was greatly needed for other work for the Order, but she was detained there, in flat contradiction of the Constitutions of the Visitation, till three years had elapsed and she could be restored to Office. She was not an unwilling victim. If she had joined her remonstrances to those of the Superior at Annecy they might have been effective, but she loved Lyons, and the commands that kept her there accorded with her own inclinations. This prolonged rule was not, however, in accordance with the Founder's intention, despite the three years' interval, and la Mère de Chantal, who had never been reconciled to it, must have watched the final chapter with peculiar interest. For more than fifteen years la Mère de Blonay had been idolised by the Community, but towards the close of her fourth term of Office a counter-influence made itself felt. Soon after her deposition she was bidden by the Archbishop to withdraw to another Convent in the diocese "for change of air," and an inquiry was held as to her direction of the Community. The inquiry itself was an insult, but she had nothing to fear from it, the only charge substantiated being the excessive devotion of the Sisters to her person. Her comment on this brings her once more before us with that unique possession of hers

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 918.

already indicated—the vanity that she had managed to derive from François de Sales.

"It is true, my dear Mother, that I am sharply blamed before His Eminence on the plea that our poor Sisters love me. They do love me, it is true, although I am not lovable; but they do so only because God wills to accomplish that which was foretold by our blessed Father, when you honoured me by taking me with you to our dear House of Bellecœur—that I should be beloved of angels and of men!"[1]

Marie-Aimée was not less sincere than la Mère de Chantal and hardly less transparent, but her reputation was based on the impression made by her personality, and she continued in all good faith to see herself reflected in the eyes of others. La Mère de Chantal, on the other hand, was not affected by the esteem that she aroused. She saw herself as always on the lowest rung of the ladder, and that which she was made itself known against her will. There is some reason for believing that for a time at least la Mère de Blonay was regarded as having reached a greater spiritual height than la Mère de Chantal, and the last-named would have been eager in support of this belief. We find her in 1636, when for the last time she stayed at Lyons, writing to another of her intimates: "I cannot describe as I should wish the pleasure it gives me to be here with our admirable Mère de Blonay. Truly *cette cadette* has made wonderful advance in virtue; more than ever she has the vision of the ways of God, and it has been a great comfort to me to reveal to her those inward sufferings which God most justly inflicts upon me. I regret one thing, however, which is that our good Mother seems to be ashamed to realise the poverty of my soul and is too distressed over its miseries, not having conceived that it could be so poor and barren."[2]

The letter was the natural expression of the writer's

[1] C. A. de Sales, "Vie," ch. xiii.

[2] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1420.

thoughts, but it is not one that could imaginably have sprung beneath the pen of la Mère de Blonay. She had in its most pronounced form the weakness of one type of really devout soul; she was so assured of the bounty of Heaven towards herself that any misgivings as to her state would have seemed rank ingratitude, and to her view nothing that she said or did needed defence before the judgment of her fellows. The sequel to her long rule at Lyons was a period of most unedifying dissension, but she seems to have had no uneasiness as to her own part in these deplorable conditions. Four years after leaving Lyons, in 1641, she returned to Annecy to succeed la Mère de Chantal as Superior. She had been absent a quarter of a century but she belonged to Annecy, and the Foundress, jealous for the high record that late events at Lyons had tarnished, had arranged for her election to the Mother-House. Nothing could be warmer than the letters of welcome sent to her before her coming, or more cordial than her reception when she came. Her presence was to be the safeguard of the Community, and the thought of it the continual consolation of la Mère de Chantal in the journey to Moulins and to Paris that lay before her. La Mère de Blonay had a great opportunity of response. The immense endowment of love and courage bestowed on the first Mother of the Visitation had not dwindled, but she was nearly seventy, and difficult tasks in distant places combined with the uncertainties of travel to tax her strength; she needed encouragement, but she did not receive it. La Mère de Blonay, in her official capacity, was critical of her absence and questioned her reasons for prolonging it, showing to the last her inability to grasp the great nature with which she had been associated for thirty years. In the history of their long intercourse there is nothing sadder than the pleading of the older woman to the younger, who has become her nominal Superior.

"I implore you to give hearty approval. . . . I have never felt any journey to be so absolutely the Will of God as I do this one. If you were here you would urge me to remain as long as I am required, or if I was still at Annecy you would summon me yourself to do what God desires of me. It is a distress to me that in all your letters you press me to return at once. . . . I can assure you that you cannot wish for my return more than I do myself, but neither you nor I can put aside God's Will for our own wishes. I cannot remember that I have deceived you in any way. It must be because I have written quite simply what was in my thoughts that you suspect me."[1]

There was no return to Annecy from that journey. In December, 1641, la Mère de Chantal died at Moulins. She had made wise provision for the years after her death. Not only did the Order increase in vigour under her successor, but the great cause that they both had at heart came to fruition, and François de Sales was raised to the Altars of the Church. On many counts the Visitation owes an immense debt to la Mère de Blonay. She set a high standard, and upheld the fine tradition of the earliest years, before a new generation. As a Superior she rose sometimes to greatness, and she was a Religious with her whole being, set apart even in childhood for that vocation. We may not follow her into the hidden places of her spiritual life, but we know that the depth and reality of its existence is in no way contradicted by those surface weaknesses that her intercourse with Jeanne de Chantal brought into prominence. The life she had chosen made severe demands on her in many directions: she met them with a success that seldom varied, and, as there is no place in the Religious Life for special friendships, her limitations as friend and confidante would not detract from her excellence as a Religious. But as we

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1834.

muse on those two natures, and the links that might have bound them in mutual sympathy and confidence, Marie-Aimée de Blonay appears as one to whom a great opportunity was offered. She failed to grasp it, or indeed to recognise it, and her failure was used in the making of a saint, but she herself fell short of the possibility life extended to her.

CHAPTER XVII.

STE. CHANTAL AS COUNSELLOR.

The ceaseless correspondence in which the swift and persistent growth of the Visitation involved its Foundress might be assumed to preclude her from intercourse not directly connected with its organisation. The Sisters of the Visitation in all its scattered homes were unsparing in their demands, and she did not spare herself. Nevertheless her influence reached out beyond the Religious life and touched the souls of men as well as of women. Not one of the daughters of the Community owed more to their Mother and Directress than did André Frémyot, Archbishop of Bourges; and, among the devout ladies who had access to her in Paris, or at Annecy, there were none who clung more tenaciously to her friendship or were more dependent on her counsels than M. Noel Brulart, Commandeur de Sillery, a man who had tasted life in many forms, as soldier, as courtier, and as diplomatist, and turned from the many prizes that it offered to seek that treasure of which the little Convent by the lake was a repository.

We have seen already that the position occupied by André Frémyot towards his sister at difficult crises of her life, did not accord with the principles that should have been natural to an ecclesiastic in high office who was also a close friend of François de Sales. Although he desired the new Order to be established in his diocese, there are many indications that he was antagonistic to the real practice of the devout life, and in the early part of his career his conduct towards his sister was ruled by selfish motives. It must

be remembered, however, that the fact of his priesthood was due to expediency. He had been trained as a lawyer, but old Frémyot had proved so staunch an upholder of the Faith in dangerous times that rewards for which he himself was ineligible were conferred upon his son. André turned his thoughts to an ecclesiastical career somewhat hastily, and was consecrated Archbishop of Bourges while still only a sub-deacon. It might be supposed that his connection with François de Sales would have served to counteract some of the danger of this false position. There is a letter[1] (in length it reaches to the proportions of a pamphlet) written from Annecy in 1604, when the Archbishop is about to become a priest, which sets before him clearly the standard, in preaching and in conduct, that his exalted office requires of him. His career might have been a very different one if his affection for the writer had induced him to profit by the counsels contained in this letter, but they do not seem, in fact, to have modified his conduct. He loved ease and social pleasures, and he was unstable by natural disposition.[2] No grave scandals sullied his reputation, but his office did not withstrain him from dabbling in politics at a moment that was perilous even for experienced politicians, and as the penalty of his rashness he was forced to resign his Archbishopric. His downfall occurred a very short time before the death of François de Sales, but neither that tragedy nor his own personal misfortunes effected any change in him. Headstrong incompetency continued to characterise his doings, and there were occasions when it is hinted that some of the Houses of the Visitation were made to suffer because of his connection with their first Superior.

We have seen that André Frémyot strove to hinder his sister in that hard labour of self-perfecting to which she gave herself; he had resisted all appeals from those who

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xii., Lett. 229.

[2] Cf. Letter from President Frémyot to S. François. *Ibid.* vol. xiii., Appendix J.

surrounded her, and it is probable that he resented the mute but constant protest of her example. But in 1624 he had a dangerous illness, and the resolutions made when death seemed near were not obliterated by recovery. With direct and humble simplicity he turned to his sister for advice and direction. He risked no disillusion; her reply showed her to be fully worthy of his confidence.

"Seeing that Eternal Goodness has given you the desire to consecrate the whole of your wishes, the whole of your doings, and the whole of yourself unreservedly without any wish to serve any end save the greater glory of God, do not waver from your resolve, but trust yourself to His loving care for you and all your wants with the fullest confidence of which you are capable. Look to Him as a child looks to a loving mother, for in all humility you may be certain that God's love for you is infinitely greater, for we cannot measure the love He showers on souls who give and abandon themselves to Him, and who have no higher aspiration than to do all that they believe to be pleasing to Him. . . .

"And as concerns your prayer, do not force yourself to follow a method of meditation; neither your capacity nor mine is suited to it. Instead keep faithfully to your own way of speaking to Our Lord, simply, with confidence and love just as your own heart bids you; and sometimes be content to remain for a little while just in His presence, still and with downcast eyes, as a child might do before his father as he waits to be told what he must do.

"And, finally, endeavour that everything you do should be done calmly and gently, and let your heart be full of joy and peace and happiness. Have no anxiety about your salvation nor about your soul, because God, to Whom it belongs and to Whom you have yielded all things, will shield it and surround it with all the blessing and comfort of His Holy Love, according to its need here and its eternal happiness hereafter—even as is desired by her to whom your soul is

as precious as her own. Pray for her, for you are never absent from her prayers, Monseigneur." [1]

Ste. Chantal accepted the position in which her brother placed her; there is no apology, no protestation of incapacity, in short no symptom of self-consciousness. Though he had been Archbishop his aims hitherto had not been spiritual. She knew it and she knew his character. With the decline of life before him he turned to search for that which had been her study for twenty years, and because the tradition of their childish friendship had never been completely broken, he looked to her in his great need. Moreover, the humility in him that made it possible to do so provoked no comment, because it was a reflection of the same quality in herself; both were absolutely natural in the new relationship that was grafted on the old.

After his appeal to her he occupied a different place in her thoughts. Because they had now a common purpose in life she felt it possible to trust him with the intimate affairs of the Congregation and even ask his advice, though it is doubtful whether her judgment ever received much aid from his. The incident at Bourges and the conflict of their wills that proved the predominance of hers, was relegated to the obscurity of a long distant past, and there is respect as well as affection in every reference to André Frémyot in the later letters of la Mère de Chantal. His experiences were stormy. With a nature such as his complete retirement would have been the only chance of maintaining the practices of the devout life with any security, and instead he risked his peace among the temptations of the Court. His sister was wise and experienced in the affairs of the temporal as well as of the spiritual world, and her suggestions to him are worthy of a true daughter of François de Sales. Because of the grace bestowed on him it would be false to be fearful of the future—that was the burden of

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 1103.

her exhortations. She was well aware of the dangers that surrounded him, but she knew his withdrawal from them and from their accompanying delights must be spontaneous if it was to be permanent, and she shows evident anxiety to avoid any expression of warning. "Never think that I would have you retire into solitude, nor leave behind you the natural business of life and ordinary intercourse which is part of your vocation. Indeed no! I would always far rather that every one kept to his own calling instead of adopting the manners of an anchorite, and you more than any other, for these extreme practices are utterly unsuited to you."[1]

André Frémyot never fell into the error of "adopting the manners of an anchorite," but his intimacy with his sister deepened, and his hold on the world became lighter as the years passed. He seems indeed to have made spasmodic efforts after real retirement, but he was a genial and popular personage and his world would not let him go. As la Mère de Chantal expressed it, "He is greatly persecuted and distracted by visitors, and he is so gentle and good-natured that he cannot refuse to see anyone who asks for him".[2] He was very near the end when that description was written, and it indicates the hold that social life still kept upon him. Yet to the mental vision of the sister, who had known him throughout his sixty-six years of earthly experience, the difficulties of temperament and circumstances with which he had had to contend were very vivid. He might seem to give way and slip back from time to time into his old indifference, but she knew that the inward struggle never ceased, that he was really faithful. She survived him only by a few months, and her reference to his death has in it the clear note of happiness.[3]

It is conceivable that Ste. Chantal welcomed the opportunities of intercourse with dwellers in the outer world

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. v., Lett. 725.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. viii., Lett. 1620. [3] *Ibid.* Lett. 1786.

that came within her reach. For such a mind as hers to be occupied constantly with the scrutiny of feminine shortcomings implies intolerable sacrifice. It was, no doubt, at some cost to herself that the difficulties and struggles of souls belonging to a very different life were made her own, but for herself, as well as for the sake of those who had appealed to her, the effort was worth making. The fifteen years during which she guided and advised her brother brought her many lessons in tolerance and breadth of vision, and her close sympathy with him helped her to meet a claim from another quarter that was not dissimilar.

Noel Brulart, Commandeur de Sillery, is one of those picturesque and dramatic figures that were produced by the life of France in the seventeenth century, and for which we may look in vain elsewhere. Part of his career was spent as the very magnificent ambassador of the Court of France to Spain and Italy, and part as the humble convert of that most homely of evangelists Vincent de Paul, and in both conditions equally he remained a dignified and courtly gentleman. He was of the stuff from which was formed the Hermits of Port Royal, but his development took another direction. M. Vincent nourished him on the teaching of François de Sales, and put him in communication with la Mère Favre, *la grande fille* of the Founder of the Visitation. Thenceforward M. de Sillery was as truly a disciple of S. François as any of those who had clung to him during his lifetime, and he was not long satisfied with the impressions of him to be obtained in Paris; he craved for something closer, and his desire took shape in a letter to the Mother Superior at Annecy. The letter aroused mingled emotions. It was sweet to Jeanne de Chantal to be hailed as the only true representative of François de Sales; and in the ten years since his death she had become more deeply imbued with his spirit, so that her conduct of her own life and of that of the Visitation was inseparable from her thoughts of him. But when, from the very

centre of the great world of Paris, there came to her a call to impart that which was her own hourly inspiration, she trembled lest she might mar it in the effort of transmission. Her first letter to M. de Sillery is quite unlike any others from her pen. She seems, even as she professed herself, to have been in fact "overcome" by his appeal to her, and she protests that she has failed to live up to the demand of her immense privilege. "I have remained poor and defenceless. I say it with a sorrowful heart, but I know myself it is true, and I would not have you esteem me as other than I am.

"I have no power really to answer you, Monsieur, for I have no knowledge; moreover, when God Himself is speaking in the heart of His servant human voices should be silent."[1]

And when her reply was signed and sealed, and ready with other despatches for Paris, her misgivings as to its inadequacy came to a head, and she enclosed it to la Mère Favre with a note whose simplicity could hardly be surpassed. "The letter of the gentleman about whom you told me pleased me greatly. There is in it such sincere humility and goodness, in one of his position it is very remarkable. But I have never had greater difficulty in writing an answer, and in my judgment it is very badly done, for I hardly know what I have said. He said nothing that was definite enough to give ground for response, asking my advice generally rather than on anything in particular. What I have said is from my heart, but if in your opinion it is better not to send it to him, I shall be glad if you will keep it back, and have another written that you would regard as better suited to his need. Not knowing me he would be none the wiser. My sense of his spiritual condition shows me that there is nothing he could gain from me, though his humility prompts him to approach me; and if he is still a beginner in the ways of

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1144.

God, he is far more likely to get what will help him from you than from me, partly because of the admiration and confidence he gives you, and partly because I feel myself so ill-provided on these lines unless it is for the Sisters of the Visitation."[1]

Certainly M. le Commandeur was not encouraged to maintain correspondence with Annecy. The Foundress had made up her mind that he was not in need of very much that the Visitation could offer him, and that la Mère Favre in Paris was the most suitable person to supply such counsel as he demanded. But his view differed from hers. His enthusiasm for François de Sales and all that concerned him was not the passing whim of a jaded courtier, but an absorbing passion, and the early summer of that same year found him at Annecy. Thereafter la Mère de Chantal regarded him with other eyes. She described him to la Mère de Blonay at Lyons as "the closest, the most devoted, and the most eager of all the friends our Blessed Founder has obtained for us".[2] She followed his spiritual progress with intense interest. He seems to have sought direction in the Visitation parlour as readily as at S. Lazare, and curious messages as to the best way to test and mortify him were despatched from Annecy to the Superior in Paris.

M. Brulart is an instance of very real conversion. He is one of many in that time of spiritual revival, but his record for fervour and tenacity could not easily be surpassed. In the seventeenth century a devotion that altered all the conditions of life ceased to be regarded as phenomenal, and its results could be studied without penetrating within Monastery walls. The religion of the present day is more moderate in its effects, more balanced, and perhaps less satisfying. The vigorous standards of Port Royal, and the direct simplicity of M. Vincent, were responsible in Paris for awakening a spirit of self-dedication that took practical form in the

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1143. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1178.

abandonment of wealth and honours. Such histories are worthy to arrest attention ; they contain much which cannot be attributed to religious emotionalism. Noel Brulart had lived violently, he had given long and faithful service to his country, and he had the reputation also of indulging freely in the wild pleasures of the generation to which he belonged. As he drew near an age when, to the wealthy, luxury becomes necessity, he came under the influence of M. Vincent and the faith revived in him. He was not content merely to withdraw from social excitements, that were becoming wearisome, to a well-appointed library, and there to meditate upon his spiritual discoveries. Although precarious health provided him with a good reason for the maintenance of comfort, and he was wealthy enough to make large offerings to the Church without inconvenience to himself, he could not be content with compromises. The "Introduction" seized his imagination, he desired to be impregnated with the spirit of the writer, and it was with that object he approached the Visitation. Enough is known of him to show that he had a shrewd and watchful mind, and, when he insisted upon intercourse with Jeanne de Chantal, he knew exactly what he was seeking. If close knowledge of the Visitation and of its Foundress had entailed any disillusion, the sequel to his history would have been very different. He was deliberate in all he did, but his movements after he met la Mère de Chantal are a supreme tribute to her and to her life-work. From the time of their meeting he went forward steadily, and she was the confidante of his most intimate impulses and aspirations. As a result he drew from her the expression of that philosophy of life which had been forming during her own gradual development. He was ardent even as she had been, and the world held him as once it had held her. His interior experience seemed in a degree to re-enact her own, and, both in warning and encouragement, there is the force of personal knowledge in every word.

"Resign all your desire for advance and for perfection into the Hands of God; leave it completely to Him, and do not wish for anything in greater measure than it pleases Him to give it. I do urge on you to rid yourself of these desires, they only tend towards anxiety and restlessness, and self-love is apt to mingle in them imperceptibly. Keep to one sole desire: simply to follow the Will of God for you, then you will go forward quietly and at peace rather than with hurry and excitement. To achieve this should be your one care. You can leave the rest to the Grace of God. It is a thousand times more to the honour of His loving-kindness that you should trust yourself to His care than that you should suffer every description of torment in your endeavour to achieve perfection for yourself."[1]

These are no empty precepts, but the fruits of the struggle and experience with which Ste. Chantal's life was full. But though her words ring with her own intimate knowledge they are none the less the echo of the teaching she had received herself from François de Sales. "Do not force yourself or make great efforts. Do not be so anxious about your soul. Accept that its state is suited to your condition. . . . Your heart is all right because your resolve is unwavering. Be at peace, my daughter, you will have your share with the children of God."[2] Thus he had written to her in the far-away days of her own uncertainties, and the confidence he had been able to impart was handed on by her to his faithful disciple, Noel Brulart. Eventually M. de Sillery became a priest, but before reaching that decision he passed through phases of such exaggerated austerity that Ste. Chantal implored Vincent de Paul who watched over him in Paris to remonstrate with him.[3] Their intimacy was not checked by his priesthood; at one moment we find her consoling him in his intense

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1248.
[2] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 304.
[3] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1298.

depression over his own failings, and quoting the hopeful sayings of S. François ;[1] at another she discovered that he had made a habit of spending four hours daily on his knees in prayer, and she had the courage to bid him reduce it to one hour, and, out of consideration for the frailty of his health, to let even that period be divided. "The height of perfection," she reminded him, "consists in desiring to be only as God would have us."[2]

His fervour was so great that to attempt to check it was to risk losing his confidence, but that thought did not deter her, and she was justified by later developments. A time came when he desired to renounce even the control of his possessions, and it was to her that he communicated his project.

She regarded it, she told him, "as a high aspiration that deserves the most careful scrutiny. It may either be inspired directly by God and so may entail definite action, or it may be an impulse arising from the complete surrender of the whole will. Sometimes Our Lord suggests an offering to which He only requires our consent. The only means of discovering the Will of God is by your own inward light and vision. I am not competent to help in anything of such great importance."[3]

Apparently that wholesale surrender did not take place, and M. Brulart remained the steward of his own wealth until he died. He was immensely generous, but he gave always for the spread of religion and not for philanthropic purposes, and some of his enterprises were not successful. It had been a maxim of S. François that readiness to give up a venture was as important to a Christian as the courage that embarked on it, and, when disappointment gave theme for condolence, congratulations are mingled quaintly with Mme. de Chantal's expressions of sympathy. Opportunities for training were the benefits she desired for her friends,

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1317.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1336. [3] *Ibid.* vol. viii., Lett. 1571.

and, though M. Brulart might appear to ordinary eyes to have realised a high standard of self-surrender, each stage of his rapid ascent only raised her aspirations for him. When outward failures and anxieties were pressing him hard her counsel is worthy of remembrance.

"It is enough for you, my dear Father, in the midst of this onslaught of distractions, to use your time for prayer in remaining quiet before God, satisfied to know that He regards you, without striving either to feel it or to make any other effort of your own. Stay where you are, at peace within and reverend in your outward attitude, and be assured that your patience is most truly prayer in the sight of God."[1]

That is direction in prayer according to the true spirit of the Visitation. After twenty years' experience the Foundress declared it as her profound conviction that the prayer to which the Sisters of the Congregation were drawn was the practice of the Presence of God in absolute simplicity. The prayer that is inactive, because of itself it checks all activity.[2] But it was only to the few who were able to understand that she attempted to communicate her secret, and there is no stronger proof of her intimacy with Noel Brulart than her instructions to him in the prayer of silence.

Realising how much he received from it, M. de Sillery was eager to give to the Community. The foundation of the second Convents at Annecy and in Paris was due to his (anonymous) liberality, and the value of his wisdom and experience in assisting both Houses in Paris in times of stress was greater than any gift of money. The Visitation had begun its life in the capital under the care of both its Founders, but even those auspices could not provide lasting protection against the peculiar dangers that surrounded it. It was a novelty at a moment when religion was beginning

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1620.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. vi., Lett. 1053.

to be fashionable. The appeal of François de Sales (like that of Fénélon at a later time) had special force because he was an aristocrat, and society regarded him as one of themselves. For this reason his Congregation was dangerously attractive, and the Convent parlours could hardly be defended from the great world. One possible Superior, for instance, had kindred who would bring a crowd of courtiers round her, while another is too much beloved by her own sex, and it was not wonderful that the Mother at Annecy trembled "lest we lose our simplicity and union with God,"[1] for the spirit of the contemplative was hard to maintain in the atmosphere of Paris.

In fact the attempt to influence fashionable life without injuring the Visitation had no success in the hands of the first two successors of the Foundress. The esteem they won at Court (the Queen and Princesses of the blood-royal were among their constant visitors) won them enmity in other directions, and each in turn was deposed before the end of her period of office. La Mère Favre was brought to Paris to repair the mistakes of la Mère de Beaumont. It was in her that Noel Brulart found his first link to François de Sales, and she became confidante and counsellor to crowds of the Court ladies.[2] But, though she was the cherished "eldest daughter" of the Founders and had had much experience, she fared no better than her predecessor. "She is admirable and virtuous, but by no means perfect."[3] such was the comment of the anxious Superior at Annecy, and her downfall was the more serious because of the natural respect accorded to her by the rest of the Community. It was a moment when the worldly position as well as the tact and wisdom of M. le Commandeur de Sillery was of great value. It was unendurable that a Convent of the Visitation should be the centre of a storm of gossip, but in Paris this scandal resulted far more from the jealousy

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vi., Lett. 1074.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 886. [3] *Ibid.* vol. vii., Lett. 1364.

and evil-speaking of those without, than from any misconduct of its inmates, and the cool judgment of a friendly onlooker discovered safeguards for the future, and could suggest real consolation for the bruised sensibilities of the deposed Superior.

The momentary glimpse of him under such circumstances is welcome. The kindly old courtier hastening across Paris to comfort and encourage a very weary and disheartened woman in the Visitation parlour, is a less austere figure than the correspondent of Vincent de Paul or la Mère de Chantal. And again, a few years later, his priesthood did not prevent him from fulfilling a somewhat similar office, when the Superior of the second Foundation was induced to lend a large sum to an adventurer who had feigned religious zeal to work on her good graces, and there seemed to be no prospect of repayment. The situation is another proof of the wide scope for folly that lay within the reach of a Superior, and the possibility of injurious results for the Congregation when it was utilised. The thief had powerful supporters in this instance, and without the influence of M. Brulart the Sisters would have had small hope of obtaining justice.[1] And while his intercourse with the Sisters of the Visitation developed both the kindliness and the piety of M. Brulart, it gave him opportunity also for the display of a human weakness as harmless as it is familiar. He had turned his back on this world's pomps and vanities, it is true, but he had been ambitious all his life, and had not realised that ambition has many unexpected forms. And so he wrote a book on S. François and his teaching, and sent a copy to every House of his Order, and la Mère de Chantal felt it necessary to urge each Superior to despatch a letter of enthusiastic praise and gratitude without delay to the expectant author;[2] by which it is suggested that she regarded literary ambition as outside the sphere where holy indifference should be practised.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1423. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1497.

In November, 1640, he died, as M. Vincent recorded, "like a saint, even as he has lived since he withdrew from the distractions of the world".[1] His friend and Directress did not survive him long.

[1] Vincent de Paul, "Lettres," vol. i., No. 50.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MARTYRDOM OF LOVE.

THE second House at Annecy, which owed its foundation to the generosity of M. Brulart, was a cherished dream in the mind of Jeanne de Chantal, long before it found any concrete form. The little city by the lake seemed to her to possess privileges which might well excite the envy of the great capitals of Europe. François de Sales had lived in its midst for more than twenty years and had chosen it as his resting-place in death, and therefore it was sacred. It is well to give their full value to the influences of these ideas upon her; there is no doubt that they were a constant theme for her reflections, and that her great solicitude for the progress and preservation of her Community was involved inextricably with her awe-struck veneration for the memory of its Founder. And even if the Visitation might seem to fail elsewhere, at Annecy its true spirit was certain of spontaneous life, and would secure the love and reverence that is accorded to every pure endeavour: such was her line of reasoning, and her desire for the second House was the natural culmination of it.

There was in fact every inducement for the citizens of Annecy to regard the Community with favour; in 1629, when the scourge of the great plague was upon them, they had been ready to acknowledge their debt to the heroism and devotion of the Sisters,[1] and Ste. Chantal, in contemplating the new venture, had assumed without

[1] Procès de Canonisation de J. F. de Chantal. Deposition de M. Hector de Fessigny, Premier Syndic d'Annecy.

misgiving that they would welcome an extension of their privileges. She made her preparations in all good faith, and only on their completion did she discover that the people were against her, and her beloved Annecy refused to harbour a second Convent of the Visitation.[1] Until then her letters had been full of that ardour and enthusiasm which she was so well able to express, the enterprise appeared to her as a tribute to the memory of François de Sales as well as a benefit to the Order and to Annecy, and therefore she had not attempted to put a check upon her eagerness in pursuit of it. In course of time the opposition was overcome and the new Foundation happily established; such incidents indeed were common in the history of the Visitation, and this one would demand no special notice save for its effect upon Ste. Chantal herself. Her Secretary records that when the opposition—which, with all it meant of covert insult and ingratitude, she had faced bravely—was withdrawn, she herself lost heart; her own steadiness of purpose assumed the aspect of headstrong obstinacy, and the clamour of her opponents echoed in her ears as the Voice of God. Her vigorous nature was hard to tame, and it may well be that she had been too violent in pursuit of an object that had seemed so worthy; she accepted rebuff upon her knees, and achievement when it was granted brought with it no personal delight.

The new Foundation was accomplished in 1633 and it remained memorable to the Mother Superior for this renewed experience that it had brought to her. There were certain truths with relation to herself that her mind had grasped even in the early days of her intercourse with François de Sales, but which were infinitely difficult of assimilation for a nature such as hers. Again and again at cost of suffering and disillusion they had to be re-discovered, for no human success or human friendship was ever given to her to rest

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1291.

in, and the grasp she laid upon each in turn was detached by force.

"It is needful for my soul to abide continually naked, and when I feel that it has ceased to be so I must cast its coverings, whatever they may be, at the feet of Jesus": that is the expression of the lesson she spent her life in learning. For the Sisters of the Visitation, for her friends and her own children, the teaching echoed that of François de Sales, *tout par amour, rien par force*, but her inmost being woke gradually to the recognition of a difference in the claim that was made upon herself. Her nature was capable of the fullest appreciation of all the deeper forms of joy which this world has to offer, and from its richness was developed the capacity for supreme sacrifice.

In her talks with the Sisters at Recreation time (which now and then were secretly noted by one or another of the listeners) we get glimpses of those revelations that life brought to her. They are as free as are her letters of all marks of premeditation.

"There is a martyrdom which is called the martyrdom of love," she told me once. "In it God preserves the life of His servants that they may work for His glory. This is the martyrdom towards which it is possible for the Sisters of the Visitation to aspire and to which God will submit those to whom He gives the privilege of longing for it." A Sister asked her how this martyrdom might be attained. "If you offer yourself for it absolutely to God you will find out," she said. "It is as though the sword of Divine Love cleaves into the most secret and intimate recesses of the soul and divides self from self. In one soul that is known to me Love has cut off all that was closest, as truly as if the sword of a tyrant had divided soul from body."[1]

Those words of hers are the fittest opening for an attempt to portray the last eight years of her earthly pilgrimage.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. i., p. 356.

All the experience that lay behind can, without any straining of the established facts, be regarded as a gradual process of ascent. The absorbing desire of the first period of her conversion found fulfilment when she was established at Annecy as the leader of the new Order, but, directly her probation was over, she passed on, through the stages we have recorded, of toil, of disappointment, and finally of deprivation. The tragedy of 1622 was the beginning of new conditions; it brought her indeed within measurable distance of the great experience of her final years, because it swept away the background of her devotional life and gave her her first glimpse of the possibilities of that isolation into which some souls are called. But arduous training still lay before her. Again and again her natural self interposed and her aspirations grew dim and shadowy, again and again she gave free entrance to human desires, she hoped and planned and was disappointed, she pinned her faith on human friendship and found its failure.

"The time will come when you will be left with nothing," François de Sales had warned her in the old days, when the difficult way that she was choosing seemed to her eager heart the path to serenity and peace; and it may be that the true meaning of surrender did not begin to dawn on her till many years divided her from the day of her Profession in the little chapel of *la Maison de la Galerie*. There were times when she seemed to herself to have reached the limit of endurance and to have given everything, but always new vistas of sacrifice opened before her, and she found that that which had seemed part of her very self must needs be offered. "Love cut off all that was closest."

The self-offering of the Religious, as regarded by those who are most in sympathy with it, should bring in its train a new capacity for prayer, an abiding sense of the intimate Presence of Our Lord. This is the natural result, let it be said with all reverence, of normal calculation of cause and

effect, and it is admitted to a place in the anticipations of the postulant faced with the pain of separation from the world's delights. That such anticipations are justified is shown repeatedly by the records of Religious Communities; in the Visitation alone there was ample evidence of it; and "the laugh of the Carmelite" is proverbial for its joyousness. Jeanne de Chantal, as she drew towards the close of a long life of labour and well-doing, seems to have had a very special claim on spiritual happiness, and the imagination pictures her moving onwards through a radiant old age to a peaceful death. But her actual experience was very different, and the reality of her development—perhaps the whole object of it—would be obscured if this stage was ignored. It is here that she neared that goal to which S. François pointed her and for which he believed her to be predestined; but at this point the record of her life alters, and no longer shows her as notable for that vigorous participation in ordinary interests which brought her so closely into touch with average men and women; instead she enters a region where she is isolated, and those who seek to follow must tread warily.

Brief references to herself in her correspondence with the Community during these years indicate the constant presence of mysterious spiritual distress, but the fuller knowledge of her state that has come down to us is due to three confidential letters which were carefully preserved. They bear tokens of having been written with difficulty, even with clumsiness; the writer makes no attempt to conform her experience to any known conditions, she is crying out because her power to bear in silence has momentarily failed her, and by her crying she revealed herself.

The one being to whom she turned when despair threatened her was Angelique of Port Royal.[1] There had

[1] This Correspondence is a subject of controversy. For the questions under dispute and the arguments connected with them, reference should be

been a certain estrangement between them due to the restrictions imposed upon the nuns by Sebastian Zamet during the disastrous period when he held direction of Port Royal. Ste. Chantal had written repeatedly and received no answer and had assumed that her friendship was rejected. But these clouds had dispersed and the "little novice" of nineteen years before was established as the chosen counsellor of her former directress.

The first letter bearing on her distress was written by Ste. Chantal in February, 1637. It opens with an account of the happy conditions that prevailed in both the Houses at Annecy and her own thankfulness for the good government of la Mère de Châtel to whom she had resigned the reins. The intention of unburdening her soul seems to have been formed only as she sat pen in hand and pictured (as plainly was her custom when she wrote) the personality of her correspondent, for the intimate passage is the closing one.

"The good God Who has sent me so much for which to be thankful concerning these dear souls has also sent me a test of inward suffering beneath which I should faint if His Loving kindness did not uphold me. With such poor powers as I have I yield myself to His just sentence on me, and I implore you, my dear Mother, to assure Him constantly that I intend never to offend Him, and that I ask of Him no other grace save that I may do and suffer only as He would have me. I say this out of darkness and with no fervour, yet it is said with my whole heart. You may judge what need I am in of your prayers and those of your dear sisters. Will you obtain for me also, my dear Mother, those of any of your friends whom you know to be near to our most gentle Saviour, that by His great mercy I may in eternity be united to Him.

made to Bougaud, "Hist. de Ste. Chantal," vol. ii., Appendix, and Gazier, "Jeanne de Chantal et Angelique Arnauld" (Champion, 1915).

The view presented in this chapter is adopted after some years of study of the persons and literature concerned.

"My very dear Mother, I know that what I say is for you only as it has always been: relying on this I cannot hide anything from you for I know also the love your heart contains for me."[1]

The correspondence which follows extends over two years, the number of the letters written from Port Royal being the larger. On both sides the humility of great natures is evident, and it is easy to understand the comfort which Ste. Chantal derived from Angelique Arnauld's direct and simple vision of her state; there is no amazement nor anxiety, there is very little commiseration, although the deepest spirit of sympathy is manifest. There were times when the horror of desolation that was upon her was so great that Ste. Chantal shrank from her vision of herself, and in some degree her terrors affected her Community, but Angelique Arnauld found in them an additional reason to confide in and ask counsel of the sufferer; she laid bare her soul as in the old days when she craved to be a Visitation novice, and every fresh revelation of the agony that afflicted her friend only increased her eagerness to knit the bond of their friendship a little closer.[2] That attitude of quiet veneration was the most calming influence that could be brought to bear upon Ste. Chantal's state. It was in sharp contrast to the consternation of those nearer at hand, and the surprise —with its suggestion of reproach—of la Mère de Blonay.[3]

At this period, which was certainly the most peaceful in the career of Angelique Arnauld, she had the support of Duvergier de Hauranne, Abbé de Saint Cyran. We are not concerned in this place with the controversies connected with the name of Saint Cyran or with Port Royal, for it is plain that Ste. Chantal was altogether ignorant of them. She never had any personal intercourse with the celebrated Director of Port Royal, but in writing to la Mère Angelique

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1458.
[2] J. M. A. Arnauld, "Lettres," vol. i., Nos. 52, 57, 63, 67, 71.
[3] See p. 257.

she expresses a desire for his advice, and made an urgent claim on his intercessions, and it is evident that she is conscious, as she writes, of the other (and even stronger) mind and spirit behind that of her correspondent.[1] It must be remembered that for thirty years, beneath all the activities which can be chronicled, her life had been devoted primarily to prayer, and to that prayer of quiet and cultivation of the Presence of God of which she treats in the more intimate of her letters. The darkness that descended upon her was immeasurably more horrifying because of the clear spiritual atmosphere to which she had so long been accustomed. We need not dwell at length on her description of it; she was, as she said, deprived of the one blessing on which she set any value; it seemed as though her long diligence in the most difficult of all studies had been completely wasted, and she had lost that which it had taken a lifetime to attain. So stated we are presented with a picture of desolation, the ordinary calculations of cause and effect have broken down, and we see absolute failure as the crown of entire self-devotion. But there was more than that: there was a period when she writes of continual agony and greater distress than words can convey or than anyone could realise; her suffering was not merely negative, proceeding from the lack of all spiritual joy, she was conscious of direct attack from without, of pressure that seemed to wear away her powers of resistance. Some part of it is conveyed in the sentence which explained her refusal to continue in authority at Annecy, the year before her death. "My reason is that the condition of my own soul is so dreadful and so unhappy that, when spiritual distress or temptation or horror is described to me, instantly I become a prey to it myself. God shows me how to give help and comfort, but I myself remain destitute."[2]

"I talk of God," she told Angelique Arnauld, "I give encouragement to others, I write as if I felt all that I say,

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1518. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i., p. 523.

but I do it all with shrinking and revolt."[1] She had directed and advised others for thirty years, and during that time she had striven to test her thoughts and desires by the standards that François de Sales had given her. Truly, it may have seemed that the foundation as well as the structure of her whole life was crumbling. And in spite of it she—in that innermost centre of the spirit to which François de Sales was wont to refer—remained steadfast. "If only I was fortunate enough to be allowed to give my life-blood for Holy Church I should be happy, yes, if it were only for the smallest particle of our blessed faith, for I thank God that I have no doubt of anything, though I seem to be destitute of all things."[2] These were her words when the pressure of her griefs was heaviest. Among the records of her counsel to others when she was near the end of life, we find the following, given to one in spiritual despair: "All that you had God gave you, He has taken it all away. What can you say save only *Fiat voluntas tua!* You have made an offering of yourself to God so often, you have implored Him so many times to take away everything that is apart from Him. Now that He has done it, and has taken you at your word, can you complain? He withdraws those gifts you were conscious of, that your soul may be vacant for Him only; give Him thanks, and suffer patiently without considering what you have done, what you are doing, nor what you will do; put all that away, and keep to the bidding of our Blessed Founder, 'Look up to God and leave all to Him'."[3]

Each sentence carries conviction, for this is the teaching that comes of personal knowledge, but Ste. Chantal lacked the literary gift of S. Teresa, and it seems that it was not part of her work to help the world by the written record of her own experience. In her own eyes her only claim on the reverence and esteem of others was her position as the

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1518.
[2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1532. [3] *Ibid.* vol. iii., p. 291.

pupil and intimate of François de Sales, and nothing distressed her more than to find she was being accredited with the attainment of an exalted state of holiness. Her estimate of herself is clearly depicted in her letters, and it is worthy of special notice in view of the tendency to couple her name with that of Mme. Guyon to which we have already referred. She could not indeed accept for herself the most obvious consolation for her spiritual affliction: that it was the discipline of God to one of His chosen. "I do not heed the suffering so much," she wrote, "but what I fear is that all the time I may be offending."[1]

Nevertheless it is abundantly clear that the venture of her life was not made in vain, but that she was allowed a share in the experience of the very few; the Dark Night of the Soul through which she laboured in her closing years does not descend upon the spiritual sluggard or on those whose surrender has been incomplete. Probably it was only due to the extreme nature of her humility that those about her formed no conception of the true nature of her state. To the last they seem to have been confused and puzzled by it, la Mère de Châtal who succeeded her as Superior at Annecy wrote to Angelique Arnauld and obtained advice[2] as to the manner in which her sufferings should be treated and regarded, and there is no suggestion of the confidence and pride that would be inspired by one in their midst who was greatly favoured; indeed Ste. Chantal refers with her accustomed simplicity to one of the Sisters in the Community as having been suggested to her as guide and example in the ways of prayer.[3] No spiritual counsellor with adequate knowledge was available, and it was just this lack which completed the claim on her entire self-surrender. She recognised that her destitution was to be without limit and accepted it: "With all my

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1752.
[2] J. M. A. Arnauld, "Lettres," vol. i., No. 58.
[3] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1532.

heart I bow before the most Holy Will of God," she wrote. "It seems to me that He would have me denuded of all things inward and outward. This is what our Blessed Founder predicted for me before I became a Religious. Indeed I desire that it should be so with all my heart; there is no blessing that I do desire save only the fulfilment of the most Holy Will in all things."[1]

Not until the very end was she given the healing touch of comprehension, and it came then from one who was a stranger to her. We have seen her, in the despair that threatened her at one stage of her spiritual anguish, stretching out her hands towards Angelique Arnauld, and drawing a certain measure of calm from the response. But each appeal to the Abbess of Port Royal was intended to reach the master-mind that then inspired and guided her, and all alike failed to produce any direct result. The particular crisis, in which Ste. Chantal had desired his aid most ardently, passed by without it, nevertheless there remained latent in her the sense that Saint Cyran held something she needed. In fact he did put together some notes intended for her comfort and then lost the manuscript, a mishap which he regarded as a Divine indication that he was not to interfere with her. This was in 1637, a year later he was arrested by order of Richelieu and personal communication became impossible.

When Ste. Chantal was in Paris, in October, 1641, she spent two days at Port Royal. Probably it is true to say that Saint Cyran held, in the mind of Angelique Arnauld, the place that with Jeanne de Chantal was occupied by François de Sales, and the fact that Saint Cyran was imprisoned and persecuted only exalted the position he held already in the limited circle of those with whom he had had personal intercourse. There is much that is forbidding in the austere figure of Saint Cyran, but his personality and his misfortunes combined

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1532.

to make a strong appeal to the imagination, and he was as present to the nuns and hermits of Port Royal when the tyranny of Richelieu held him in durance at Vincennes, as when his visits to them were continual. Throughout the years of his persecution the thoughts and prayers of Ste. Chantal had been with him. She took a share naturally in the pre-occupation of Port Royal during her stay there; no doubt her intimate conversations with Angelique Arnauld were full of references to his teaching and probable opinions, and she came away as deeply imbued with the desire for his counsel as she had been at that earlier stage when she fought against her sufferings.

La Mère Angelique acted as intermediary, and once again Ste. Chantal made appeal to the Abbé de Saint Cyran.[1] For him the years since her last attempt had been full of tribulation, inward and outward, and he had reached a different stage even as she had done. She wrote only the briefest of notes, for she was aware that all Angelique Arnauld's knowledge of her had been communicated to him; she thanks him for his prayers, and asks that, if he should feel that he holds any message for her, he will not fail to deliver it. His reply was the wonderful letter of October 25, the only one he ever addressed to her.

The temperament of Saint Cyran betrayed him into violence of expression which injured the cause he had at heart, but his views as to the standard of conduct necessary to a Christian coincided with those of Ste. Chantal, and the aims of the Visitation inspired him with the deepest reverence. His letter makes it clear that as a personality she was as vividly real to him as he to her. He had made a vow that if freedom was restored to him he would make a pilgrimage to Annecy, and he suggests that if he found her there, they might discuss her spiritual distress, and it would then be plain to her how incompetent he

[1] J. Duvergier de Hauranne, "Lettres," vol. i., No. 7.

was to give her any help in writing, but it is evident that he did not expect they would ever meet on earth. Throughout, he shows that her sufferings seem to him to be sacred, and he brought forward the long-past incident of the papers, prepared for her and lost, as proof that she was removed beyond the reach of human consolation. Doubtless he had an intuition that she was near the period of her sufferings, all that he says is retrospective, and he avoids all the conventional attempts at comfort. It may be permissible to picture him, in the solitude of his prison at Vincennes, allowing his mind to concentrate on this woman whose conditions had been brought before him so vividly by the letters from Angelique Arnauld. Whatever brought him to his conclusions it was he, of all who knew her, who came nearest to fathoming her mysterious agony,[1] and was able, with awestruck admiration, to hail her as greatly privileged.

"Not only is there nothing to be fearful of in your position," he wrote, "but I dare to tell you that on the contrary it seems to me to be so sacred that any wish for relief or comfort in it comes from self-interest—it is of God, O blessed suffering, not permitted to every soul! It may be that you are living solely for this, and when your inward misery is ended it will be your end too and you will cease to live. . . . I am convinced that your distresses, instead of lessening your love towards God, are quickening, and make you think of Him more constantly and with more submission than you would otherwise. . . . The true condition which God requires in a soul that looks to Him only, is that, with her gaze fixed on the highest point of the Cross, above the Head of our Saviour, she should keep her mind and inmost heart in constant aspiration towards Him, desiring to receive nothing that does not come from Him. This being so—that I may do nothing against the Divine

[1] For clearer light on Saint Cyran's Letter, see S. John of the Cross, "The Dark Night of the Soul," book ii., chs. vii., viii., ix.

ordinance or harm you in my desire to help—I leave you in the Hands of the All-Powerful by whom you have been so blessedly guided until now. . . . The one consolation for you, insomuch as the ceaseless anguish of your soul is perhaps a hindrance to the intercourse with God that you desire, is to take your part with the Saints in that prayer which is simply keeping your gaze on God to the fullest extent that your faith—purified as it has been by suffering—will allow you. And there can be no greater consolation, because this is the prayer of the blessed Ones which they offer not for themselves but for others. Consequently it is the most perfect of all, and will one day become a part in you of the perpetual praise of God, even as it now is in them, whenever it shall please God to relieve you of these sufferings, and to change them into the ineffable delights which you will win by means of them."

Saint Cyran advances as he writes, seeming to feel his way and hardly daring to trust what is his real conviction. Only in the final paragraph is his thought fully revealed. If in her utmost agony—he tells her—she is able in the depths of her soul to maintain the firm intention of complete surrender of herself to God, her purpose before Him will be a true reflection of that which was shown in Jesus Christ on the day of His Passion.[1]

That was the message that he held for her. In his solitary musings, fired as they were with vivid admiration and sympathy, he had had vision for that which was hidden from her contemporaries, and most of all from herself. He and she alike suffered acutely from their sense of the sin that was rife about them, but he, by the violence of his condemnation of others, was unfitted for the privilege to which he believed she had attained, and, though he may have known a spiritual darkness that was hardly less than hers, he missed the glory of complete submission. Therefore the experience that he shared with her stopped short

[1] J. Duvergier de Hauranne, "Lettres," vol. i., No. 8.

of her achievement, he could only recognise and bow before it.

The distresses and temptations that others describe to me become my own—this was Ste. Chantal's confession to Angelique Arnauld—and, plainly, her position towards sinners was not of dismay and horror, but of such infinite compassion that their burden became hers. May we find here the key to the enigma of her great affliction? All words are dangerous in the attempt to solve the meaning of these last years of her earthly experience, but the Dark Night of the Soul was surely known to Christ on Calvary in that moment when the whole force of the whole world's sin swept over Him in its overwhelming blackness. His faithful follower, Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, had struggled upwards through all the human hindrances and ordinary follies and temptations of normal life. She had known the trials and bereavements common to those who dwell in the world, she had passed on to voluntary sacrifices of the most searching and intimate nature, and she entered at length on a final stage before which we—with Saint Cyran—may well stand awestruck. If indeed it is ever given to the members of Christ's Body to share in the least degree in the work of His sinless Penitence, that, surely, was the sacred task in which Ste. Chantal's closing years were occupied.

The reverent tribute of Saint Cyran reached her, after long delays, just before the cloud lifted from her spirit, and, as he had foreseen, death was then close at hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST JOURNEY.

"How wonderful it is that God conceals from you the gift which is the inmost centre of your being while He makes it so manifest to others. The more you are conscious of your lack of virtue the more evident is your possession of it."

Thus did Angelique Arnauld write to Ste. Chantal in 1637, and she was not using the language of compliment but making a simple statement of fact. During her years of trial, in which she described her mind as "a sort of enclosure in which all evil things run wild," Ste. Chantal, constantly and increasingly, was an influence for all that was deepest and purest in the spiritual life. In 1638, when the long-projected Foundation at Turin actually was made, her journey to the Piedmontese capital was of the nature of a royal progress. She was an old Religious and had never taken any part in public affairs, living in even greater retirement than was expected of the Abbesses of well-known Orders, but—perhaps because of the simplicity and candour that were hers to such a marked degree—she held a place in popular imagination as representing that great force of prayer, which the world neglects and covets simultaneously. Profound conviction in the reality of the unseen seems to have radiated from her. In spite of all her inward anguish (or perhaps the more clearly because of it) her being was not separable from her faith, and in the midst of the sin and misery and cruelty of those unsettled times, this treasure which she held shone like a beacon from which innumerable smaller fires might be kindled.

"The more complete the deprivation—even of all sense of peace in God—the greater the strength and tenderness of the soul, for it will learn that it must be so simple and so pure as to find no support save only in God Himself."[1] Such was the comfort Ste. Chantal had been able to offer when another soul in misery had appealed to her, and, although the strange fear and isolation that were part of her own martyrdom prevented her from taking it to herself, her words do in fact explain her position towards others. Complete deprivation had resulted in that tenderness of the soul which she describes, and prepared her to be the instrument of God in the lives of those around her. She had capacity for galvanising sluggard wills to energy and transforming ardent feeling into sincere resolve. Some power within her leaped out to waken hope in the worst conditions of despondency, even while she herself was bordering on despair. It was said of her after her death by an unnamed "servant of God" (who was probably S. Vincent de Paul) that whatever might be the form of prayer on which she was consulted she always had perfect understanding of it, so that the hearer felt that besides the counsel, which seemed of divine suggestion, she had knowledge which met his own at every point and had been won by personal experience.

The question of direction was one to which her vocation as Superior and Foundress had forced her to give serious study. She summarised her view of it in a few words. "The secret of it," she said, "is first to discover and to explain the way by which God is drawing each particular individual; and second to be intent only to fulfil God's intention, regardless of one's own private convictions, and without wishing to acquire any credit or to establish one's own influence."[2]

To use that secret when discovered requires, first, a power of intuition of no common order, and second, a

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. vii., Lett. 1532. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i., p. 536.

capacity of response to the most searching of all demands, for the desire of influence outlasts all other cravings of self-love. In the early stages of her soul's combat at Montelon and at Dijon, Jeanne de Chantal was confronted by a wide array of spiritual assailants; it had needed many years of resolute warfare before this last of them was put to flight, and the annihilation of self-interest left her with no desire to dominate; but when she pleaded for freedom from further office she was inspired by the longing to accept direction rather than to give it, and to take the lowest place. There had been, so says the chronicle of la Mère de Chaugy, a contest between Ste. Chantal and la Mère de Blonay, when in May, 1641, the latter assumed authority at Annecy, over the position to be held by the deposed Superior; and it became so vehement that the Bishop of Geneva was forced to interpose, giving it as his judgment that Ste. Chantal might claim the lowly place she coveted, and practise all the rules and restrictions imposed as lessons in humility for those who had held and had laid down authority. She had hoped to end her days in the quiet Convent by the lake, and, in the seclusion that she desired, to prepare for the coming of death. But a very different lot awaited her. François de Sales had written to her of his own experience: "In short, I must always go when I long to stay, and I am always summoned to the Court when I desire retirement".[1] Such are the real exercises of the surrendered will, and her share in them ended only with her life.

The very violent course of contemporary history had done little to shape the experiences of Ste. Chantal. The men of her family were called away to fight, periodically, and her son was killed in action; but military service in one direction or another was at all times the normal career of a gentleman, and of the inner developments, the questions and intrigues that divided opinion in the ruling class, she

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xix., Lett. 1645.

had no knowledge. She came nearest to that inner circle through the House at Moulins, where, during the last years of her life, the heroine of a celebrated political tragedy had found sanctuary, and thus the last scenes in which she bears a part were not set in the dim retirement of a cloister but lit as by a searchlight of publicity.

Mme. la Duchesse de Montmorency, whose husband was beheaded at Toulouse in 1631 for conspiring against Richelieu, was imprisoned at Moulins for some years, and with such severity that she was not permitted to receive a visit from la Mère de Chantal when an opportunity offered. After her liberation she moved only from the Castle to the Visitation Convent, where she occupied the separate building erected by the rebellious nun Marie-Aimée de Morville. So great a reality was her desire for retirement that Ste. Chantal's fears as to the disturbing influence of admitting a great lady within the Convent precincts were laid to rest, and she felt their celebrated guest to be a help in maintaining the spirit of the Visitation amid surroundings where that spirit had suffered so much disturbance.[1] After six years close association with the Community Mme. de Montmorency decided to seek admission to it. In June, 1641, her intention became so clear as to allow no further doubt, and she desired that her clothing as a novice should take place at the hands of la Mère de Chantal. Due weight must be given to the devout respect accorded by a loyal French subject to royal blood. The attitude of the Visitation and its Foundress towards this lady does not imply a relapse into worldliness, but obedience to an instinct that was inherent. The innumerable arguments against the departure of Ste. Chantal from Annecy were set aside, and at the end of July she set out for Moulins.

She had no misgivings as to the validity of the claim, and could write cheerfully that she was starting in good health and spirits and hoped, all being well, to return in

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1745.

about four months ;[1] but the record of her Secretary, which describes her farewell to Annecy, is full of indications that she did not expect ever to return. She stayed at Lyons on her way and found there some reason for discouragement; by the middle of August she was writing from Moulins full of her conviction that (apart from the claim of the royal postulant) her journey had been justified by the needs of both these houses, and of her eagerness, with the spirit of the old war-horse, to instil the true spirit of the Order where the practice of it seemed to have grown lax.[2] In fact the need of Mme. de Montmorency was sufficient by itself to justify her journey. A Duchess of the blood-royal who enters the Religious Life bears a testimony to the value of unseen things which is far more effective and more widespread than that of her humbler Sisters, and the bearing of it demands peculiar courage. It was no mere whim that inspired Mme. de Montmorency to plead for the help of la Mère de Chantal. The great sorrow that had for a time unbalanced her was still engrossing, and in dealing with it she needed the counsel of one who had known a like experience. In bygone times[3] Mme. de Chantal had not been able to subdue the bitterness with which she regarded the kinsman who had shot her husband, and François de Sales had required her to offer to be godmother to that kinsman's child. The difficulty that assailed Mme. de Montmorency was different in detail, but it required a remedy of the same drastic order. During her imprisonment she had given free rein to her grief, and after ten years all her life still centred on the memory of her husband, and she made his portrait a central object in her Oratory. The pupil of François de Sales had no tolerance for this form of emotional indulgence, but she brought to it complete understanding. She gave no direction, but she described the nature of the claim made by Our Lord on those He summons to the

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1816. [2] *Ibid.* 1824.
[3] See "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiii., Lett. 297, 357.

Religious Life, and Mme. de Montmorency committed her cherished portrait to the flames. It was a definite step towards her entry into the Novitiate, but family affairs were a clear reason for delay until the autumn, and she was left to give herself to consideration of the future during a period of solitude, for the Houses of the Visitation in Paris were demanding a share in the privilege of Moulins.

The letters of Ste. Chantal at this time are instinct with her power as Superior and Foundress; wherever she went she found so much that had fallen from the original standard of the Visitation. "I have never in my life come across anything to match four of the Sisters who are here!" she wrote from Moulins, with all her old vivacity.[1] But she was hampered by the misunderstandings and suspicions of la Mère de Blonay,[2] who failed to recognise the importance of the work that she was doing, and there is no stronger evidence of the self-mastery she had acquired than the wording of her replies to the perpetual remonstrances from Annecy. Her visit to Paris was eventful. Although her letters contain reference to many projects for "next year," the thought seems to have been constantly present in her mind that all she did she did for the last time, and her attitude towards the approach of death enhanced the impression of dignity and solemnity that surrounded her.

It was at this point that, for the first and last time, she had personal intercourse with Anne of Austria. Before the birth of the Dauphin a message had been conveyed from the Queen to the Superior at Annecy asking for her prayers, but Ste. Chantal had refused to comply with the suggestion that she should write a letter of compliment, on the plea that she was too insignificant a person to warrant it. It needed a very definite advance on the part of the Queen to effect a meeting, and in fact the last stage of Ste. Chantal's journey to Paris was made in a royal litter with the Queen

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1828. [2] *Ibid.* Lett. 1834.

by her side. She was required to rest at Saint Germain, and was not suffered to depart until she had given her blessing to the Dauphin and his brother, who, mere babies though they were, were bidden to kneel before her to receive it. This honour was not one that Ste. Chantal would have coveted or regarded as altogether consistent with her position as a Religious, and there is no reference to it in any of the letters that she wrote from Paris, but it is to the credit of Anne of Austria that she had so vivid a sense of the reality of goodness, as to force her favours on such unwilling recipients as Jeanne de Chantal and Vincent de Paul.

The visit to Saint Germain was only a passing distraction, but the weeks spent in the Paris House were so crowded that la Mère de Chantal was forced to rise at 3.30 to transact business before the hours when personal interviews could be demanded of her. The spirit of religious revival was working increasingly in Paris, and prominent men and women, stirred from their calm acceptance of customs and conditions, were ready to fling away their wealth and honours and seek salvation within Convent cells. At spiritual crises such experience and good sense as was possessed by the Foundress of the Visitation are of inestimable value. A prominent citizen of Montpelier consulted her as to his vocation for the Religious Life. "Who is to steer the ship of the world, Monsieur," she said, "if all the righteous leave it?" She had capacity to hold the balance between restless emotionalism and real fervour, and those who came seem to have trusted her and not to have come in mere idle curiosity. But the strain of responsibility was all the greater; the subtleties of devout inclinations were far harder to deal with than clearly outlined sins, and the great world of Paris held complexities of temperament and circumstance for which even her thirty years' experience of direction could not prepare her. At that stage, however, it was not on experience or judgment that she herself would have relied, and the sense of this,

even if only half-acknowledged, brought anxious souls in a continuous stream to the parlour of the Visitation.

The affairs of the Order occupied her constantly. At that time there were eighty-six Houses, each one of which, to justify its existence, ought to have been a living witness to the spirit of François de Sales. And it was rare, in her journeys from one House to another, to find practices that conformed to the high standards of the Visitation; the weakness of human nature within Convent walls, and the intrusion of local influences from without, were apt to cloud the pure atmosphere essential to the contemplative. Throughout her twenty years of government her letters are full of laments over the unfaithfulness of those who have given the outward pledges of surrender, and, with the approach of death, her vision of the dangers that encompassed the Order only grew keener. The burden would have been insupportable save for her ever-deepening faith in the Divine institution of the Order; but that did not fail her for an instant, and her teaching, as the end approached, was of root principles rather than on any details. She summoned the Superiors of those Convents that were within a moderate distance of Paris to see her during her visit there and receive the last charges she could give them, but only a few were within reach, and her message to the Visitation was committed to writing before she died. "Take care, my very dear daughters, that you do not alter your Rule to suit your inclinations. Be absolutely true of heart and hold to simplicity of life, to poverty, and to that charity which does towards your Sisters in speech and act as you would have them do to you—I mean to every one and in all things. . . . May the prayers of Our Blessed One obtain for you the spirit of humility and lowliness by which alone the Order can be preserved."[1]

That final counsel has an austere directness that must have recalled its author vividly to all those who knew her.

[1] "Vie et Œuvres," vol. viii., Lett. 1852.

Simplicity, poverty, charity, complete humility, *rien demander et rien refuser*, that was what the Visitation asked of its daughters and that was what it offered them, and she who had been its first Professed could see no reason—after thirty years' experience and practice—to soften its real severity. There is cause for wonder, if we regard her insistence on this spiritual austerity which was the true mark of her Order, that its numbers increased so rapidly under her hand; and to herself that rapid increase was a reason for alarm rather than for congratulation, although to the onlooker it seemed the surest testimony that her life-work had not been wasted. Perhaps when the time came for looking back with the sense that her work was finished, the normal rating of success and failure had ceased to have much value for her, and those weeks in Paris, outwardly so triumphant, showed her to herself as a faltering, inadequate channel for the message that God had entrusted to her. At that last stage of her journey she was recognised and acclaimed as the great organiser, the great influence, the great leader that she had proved herself to be, but as the years passed they had robbed her of her natural resemblance to the type of masterful womanhood that these terms suggest. Again and again we find her deferring to those whom she had ruled, submitting to the will of others even against her judgment, and always ready to attribute the darkness enveloping her soul to her own errors. The enthusiasm that she inspired in the world of Paris left her wearied and unelated, and she started on the return journey to Moulins with relief. Every farewell she said she regarded as a final one, and among the Community in Paris there were some who were specially dear to her; therefore the strain on heart and mind, apart from the pressure of abiding spiritual distress, must have been intense.

It was the month of November, travelling was difficult and the season unfavourable. La Mère de Chantal visited the Convents at Melun, Montargis, and Nevers, and strove

in each to play her accustomed part of confidante and counsellor to every one of her vast family; but it was plain to her companions that her strength was failing. Mme. de Montmorency awaited her at Moulins eagerly, looking forward to the winter months of quiet intercourse with her chosen teacher which had been promised her. After her arrival la Mère de Chantal attempted to take her share in the normal life of the Community, but on December 8 she was seized with an attack of fever as she knelt in chapel in the early morning. She pleaded for Communion, that being the thirty-first anniversary of the day when François de Sales had bidden her make her Communion daily.[1] Afterwards the Sisters carried her to bed. She suffered in body for five days, but spiritual peace was granted to her and her faculties were clear. On December 13, 1641, she died.

Consideration for Mme. de Montmorency was very prominent in her mind, and she feared rash dealing with the difficult question of her vocation. The three charges she laid upon her indicate that the keenness of her judgment was not dimmed by bodily weakness. She was to restore her marriage portion to her family: to refrain from bringing wealth to the House at Moulins lest prosperity should rob it of the spirit of poverty and self-surrender: and to await the complete settlement of all her worldly affairs before entering the Community.

Mme. de Montmorency proved herself faithful in obedience. She was not professed until 1658, and died as Superior at Moulins nine years later. La Mère de Chantal had recognised in her the true spirit of the Visitation. She proved herself to be a source of strength and fervour at all times throughout the period of her connection with the Order; but at no moment was she more useful to it than in the week that followed immediately on the death of the Foundress. As those at Annecy had feared would come to

[1] "Œuvres de François de Sales," vol. xiv., Lett. 583.

pass, Ste. Chantal had died away from the resting-place that rightfully was hers, and in those lawless days the claim of justice between one province and another was easy to defeat. Moulins desired to retain the body of one who was held in veneration, and the natural wishes of the Duchess would have led her to support her fellow-citizens; but she was already at one with the Visitation, and knew that their Foundress, in life and death, belonged to Annecy. Wealth and the power that goes with high position aided her, and in secret, without contest or scandal, the coffin was removed from Moulins and conveyed homewards. Every precaution was taken until distance from the city made them unnecessary, and then all secrecy was discarded and the pomp and circumstance that appealed to popular taste surrounded this last journey of Ste. Chantal.

She rested finally in a splendid tomb, and, although a century passed before her sanctity obtained official recognition, she was the object of many a devout pilgrimage to Annecy. Of the fruit of her labours it is difficult to speak; the true life of the Visitation is a hidden one, and, where it preserved the spirit of the Founders, it won no notoriety. The same intention of hiddenness shrouds the record of her personal experience; the gradual development it represents —the slow process of purification—is not revealed by following the procession of events that compose her outward history. The call of her vocation, though she followed it faithfully step by step, was not fulfilled when she took her vows in the chapel of *la Maison de la Galerie* nor even when she made her great renunciation six years later. Her education was a long and stern one, and its fruition must be sought in those years of darkness that were also its final stage.

Panegyrics of Ste. Chantal abound, but the language of panegyric as applied to herself would have caused her infinite distress. There is one testimony, however, whose value cannot be discounted. For twenty years she had been

in communication with Vincent de Paul, and in her last visit to Paris had once more sought spiritual consolation from him. The two were in deep sympathy, and the Foundress of the Visitation had brought about the settlement of the Mission priests at Annecy.[1] Her death was a calamity to the Superior at S. Lazare, and he wrote of her out of the fullness of his heart:—

"It seemed to me at all times that she was full of every sort of virtue, and particularly of faith, although throughout her life she was beset by the temptation of doubt; also that she had supreme confidence in God, and was wise, moderate, tolerant, and firm to a most unusual degree; and that the spirit of humility, austerity, and obedience, and zeal for the perfecting of her Order and the salvation of souls possessed her absolutely.

"I have never observed any faults in her, and always the practice of every sort of virtue; and yet, although she seemed to possess the peace and quietness of spirit natural to souls that have advanced far in the devout life, she underwent such intense inward suffering that she has told me many times in speech and writing that her mind being full of temptation and horror, it was a continual effort with her to withhold her thoughts from the vision of herself because she could not bear what seemed like a glimpse of hell.

"In spite of this anguish she never lost her outward calm nor slackened, either in those practices of the Christian and of the Religious that God required of her, or in the immense care that she devoted to her Order. Therefore I believe her to have been one of the holiest souls that I have ever known."[2]

The simplicity of Vincent de Paul had made him akin with her of whom he wrote. She was vividly before him with all her mysterious distress and her strong courage, and his knowledge of her was neither tempered nor exaggerated. He could look back over twenty years of associ-

[1] Vincent de Paul, "Lettres," vol. i. No. 54. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i., No. 58.

ation, the twenty years that, if we have judged her life aright, measured the period of her fullest and most rapid growth, and at their close he paid her his quiet tribute: "I believe her to have been one of the holiest souls that I have ever known".

CHAPTER XX.

THE TEACHING OF SAINTE CHANTAL.

It is not easy to sum up the teaching of Ste. Chantal. In following her gradual ascent the human interest of her life seizes the imagination, and the lesson of her development may easily be lost. Her experiences and her manner of meeting them are still vivid after three centuries because, till they ended, she never lost the quality of eagerness which had delighted François de Sales, or the vivacity which, though she held it in common with so many of her countrywomen, is specially characteristic of herself. Yet the hidden life that went on behind the sorrows and failures and activities that have been described is not wholly without record. The reflection of it while her spiritual guide was still in reach may be found in the "Traité de l'Amour de Dieu" of François de Sales, but her own words give us an impression of the succeeding stages which the ordinary mind can grasp more readily.

Her notes of a private retreat bring us into touch with her method of thought in her earlier years as a Religious. "It is sufficient for me to offer to God my incapacity, my weaknesses, regarding myself as wretched, failing and sinful, and coming before Him as a mean and needy suppliant. Ah, how happy we should be if we ceased to consider what we do or bear, and cared only for the fulfilment of the Will of God. . . . I have seen by Our Lord's assistance that my failures are the result of not being sufficiently watchful over myself or attentive to God; this has hindered my readiness to accept everything that happens to me, and

even more has interfered with the intention of doing all things as service to God. I have seen also that in prayer I am not sufficiently simple, that I am always desiring to make some effort, and in this I am very wrong, because God asks from me only that I should look to Him in all things with the surrender of entire confidence and without conscious acts. I have seen also that I am in too great a hurry to carry out whatever occurs to me, I am conscious of eagerness, due to the desire to get it completed and done with. I allow matters that are of no importance to take too large a place in my mind, and this distracts me greatly and interrupts my sense of God's Presence. I resolve—with Thy aid, O my Saviour!—to follow Thy will without seeking the reason that Thou hast ordained one thing rather than another. Thus blindly I will follow Thee without regard for my own wishes. And this being so I yield myself to God with no intention of my own save that I may remain quiescent in His Arms and desire only what He would have me desire."[1]

From those few lines of intimate self-expression the personality of Ste. Chantal rises once more before our mental vision. "You seem to be present with me, my dear daughter, with your great heart which loves and wills so strongly." So had S. François written to her, and her vehemence of heart and will continued to the end of her life to be to her at once a source of strength and a channel of temptation. Her letters indicate some occasions when that over-eagerness which she discovered in herself betrayed her into ill-judged action, but the energy and courage associated with this supposed defect bore fruit in the vigorous life of the new Order. It is not hard, indeed, to realise her in the midst of her activities, it was for these that she was fitted by her natural qualities, and the fact that her quick impulses were a temptation needed no telling. It is the hidden side of her nature, apparently simple,

[1] "Œuvres," vol. ii., pp. 23, 24.

inwardly so complex, that must be sought in the chance revelations of meditation notes and letters.

Ste. Chantal's presentation of the Prayer of Simplicity had an effect which cannot be measured on the practice of the devout life; the Visitation carried the knowledge of it further with every fresh establishment, and new possibilities were revealed to souls that had been checked and thwarted by their incapacity to fulfil the conditions hitherto required of them. And Ste. Chantal, who was herself pre-eminently the type of the capable and active woman, taught from her own experience: she accepted her own conclusions and the practice that resulted: "God asks from me only that I should look to Him in all things, with the surrender of entire confidence and without conscious acts".

The full effect of Ste. Chantal's teaching was hampered by the follies of Mme. Guyon, but she had been careful to provide safeguards against such follies appearing among her followers, for none knew better than did she the dangers of the way. In her charges to the Sisters the note of austerity is never lacking, the devout life as she presented it had no lures for the sentimentalist. "The secret of spiritual life," she told them, "is to keep close to God and constantly to maintain the realisation of His Presence, but this Presence must be known by faith and not by feeling. In the same way we shall not reach perfection by taste and sentiment, but by a firm resolve to surrender to God, and an unswerving purpose of self-discipline and renunciation of all things without reserve, for otherwise there is no way to perfection. We pay too much heed to feelings and not enough to the real spirit." [1]

Or again, as she wrote to one of them who was tempted to excessive introspection: "Never look at yourself to see what you are doing or feeling or what is happening to you, avoid all reflections on yourself and in their place fix your mind simply upon God, be content to realise that He is your

[1] "Œuvres," vol. ii., p. 350.

God. . . . It is needful that you should make this resolve: that you will not fix yourself any longer either on the past, the present, or the future, but solely on God and on His Will.

"I am reminded of what Our Lord told us in the Gospel, of the woman who lost a coin, how she turned out all her house to find it; in the same way Our Lord, missing in you your first innocence and purity, overturns all your life that he may find it."[1]

Ste. Chantal had deep knowledge of the misgivings that are apt to check the progress of devout souls, and also of the unwelcome experiences that are often the means of their advance. From these she had no wish to shield her daughters: "The surest sign that we are serving God," she told them, "is that we should follow a path that we have not known; and when it seems that everything that concerns our soul has been turned upside down, so long as we go on faithfully doing what is right, we need not be anxious as to where we are going or think anything about it; we must simply go on with the intention of complete self-abandonment before God. . . . The best practice of the virtue of patience in the spiritual life is bearing with oneself in failure and feebleness of will."[2]

"My very dear daughters, I have desired to show you how we should prepare to receive the Holy Spirit. The only preparation is to draw very close to the Divine Will and to banish self. I have been wondering during these last days how it came about that we made so little advance, and it seemed to me that our chief hindrance was the uselessness of the reflections with which our minds are too much occupied. As these, ordinarily, are simply idle thoughts we do not take sufficient pains to rid ourselves of them. Oh! we should struggle against them if they were evil or if they were temptations, for then they would

[1] "Œuvres," vol. iii., p. 294. [2] *Ibid.* vol. ii., p. 313.

be so manifestly wrong that we could not cling to them. But we are not ready enough to make a clearance in ourselves; we are too wrapped up in self-love, self-interest, self-will, in our own wishes and our own convenience. Oh! let us have done with self for a little and let us cast ourselves headlong on the mercy of the Divine Will. . . . All day and at all times, even at every moment if we are able, let us be reaching out towards God; let us hold ourselves ready to be led by Him and to accept His Will in whatever may happen to us!" [1]

Something more than these general rules was demanded by the Sisters, they needed detailed instruction upon the method of prayer, and in reply to their questions in conference and correspondence Ste. Chantal revealed some of the fruit of her knowledge and experience. It is the prayer of simplicity rather than the prayer of quiet that she teaches; her own words convey it to us: "The truest system of prayer is when there is no system, when the Holy Spirit has mastered the soul who prays, for He can do with it as He wills—free thenceforward from rules or methods. . . . Prayer comes by grace and not by planning. Let prayer be begun in faith and continued in hope, and only interrupted when charity summons us to doing and suffering. The first condition necessary for prayer is singleness of purpose in glorifying God; the second that absolute resignation by which we become indifferent as to anything that may happen to us; the third the relinquishing of self-esteem, regarding ourselves only as God regards us." [2]

As we read, the vision of the wise and capable Foundress and Superior fades, and we see only the kneeling nun. "When it is time for us to come before His eternal goodness and be alone with Him, the time for what we call prayer, the fact that we hold ourselves in the presence of His Spirit constitutes prayer, whether or no we have good thoughts and intentions. All that is necessary is to hold

[1] "Œuvres," vol. ii., p. 190. [2] *Ibid.* vol. iii., p. 259.

ourselves before Him quite simply and without any great effort, but with loving desire and full purpose of dismissing everything else; if we do this all the time we are on our knees God will accept it as prayer, for if we are humble in suffering the assaults of vain thoughts and distractions it is as acceptable to Him as the highest aspirations we have had at other times. The longing of a loving heart for God and its endurance of unwelcome difficulties is one of the most perfect prayers.

"When we pray we should be as empty vessels before God, into which His grace may be poured drop by drop if He so wills, and we should be nearly as ready to go home with our vessel empty as if it had been filled to the brim. In the end—if we come to Him continually with complete faith and without making any demand—it is quite certain that the Water of Life will be poured into our vessel, and indeed we are apt to think we are bringing it back empty when, though we do not know it, it is full of the Spirit of God.

"The Spirit of God for which we ask in our prayers is like the Body of Christ made by the consecration of the priest. Both one and the other are necessary to us, and were promised by Jesus Christ our Saviour for the nourishing of our souls; nevertheless as a rule neither the priest nor we ourselves, when in Communion we know by faith that we have received the Body of Jesus Christ, have any taste or any consciousness; but (if the term may be used) we digest it by faith, having certainty on the word of God although we cannot see nor feel nor taste, that, none the less, He nourishes our souls and instils in them light and vigour in the midst of the darkness and dullness that He allows to remain in us after we have received Him."[1]

"The Master raises a supernatural building in every soul just as He wills. Discipline your nature, and check all its promptings that might be in opposition to God's plan, this

[1] "Œuvres," vol. ii., p. 324.

building will be raised by grace in a way of which you know nothing! In this state of holy indolence our capacity for love becomes greater, and the shafts of Divine Love strike far more deeply; our own activity keeps the soul chained; it is in stillness that it grows. It is essential that all human affection should dissolve and be merged completely in the Will of God, for without this how can God be all in all to man? The wisdom of God, to which our understanding must be united, cannot be represented so that our mind can grasp it, and as we must be in some degree conformed to the Divine Wisdom to achieve perfect union, it follows that the soul must be absolutely free and absolutely pure, not allowing any other affection to intervene.

"The perfect condition of memory is its concentration upon God to such a degree that all things, even itself, are forgotten and that it rests quietly in God only, out of reach of the clamour of thoughts and wild fancies; the more memory can be freed from picturing anything apart from God, the more it can be given to God and kept empty in the hope that He will fill it."[1]

As line by line we strive to follow the thought of the writer, we see that the result of the deadly struggle within her between her human instincts and her desire to respond to a superhuman claim was a foregone conclusion; she was one of those of whom God takes possession, for whom life is cut asunder as with a sword. Nature was strong in her; to the last clinging human affection was always ready to revive, but the vision permitted to her dominated natural desire, she *saw*, and thereafter she could not rest in those conditions of normal life where others are permitted to fulfil God's purpose faithfully. Most of her teaching on the deep things of prayer was addressed to the Sisters of the Visitation, and it should be remembered that the souls she had in view were already consecrated to the special conditions of the Religious Life, and had accepted that prayer was the

[1] "Œuvres," vol. iii., p. 280.

chief reason of their being. The difficulty which much of her teaching holds for dwellers in the world could not arise in those for whom it was intended. It will be seen that she assumes in them a position which is not that of practical life.

"The giving of the heart is the one essential for prayer, failing that all effort is a mockery, with that nothing more is needed. There is no reason for astonishment when those who devote themselves to prayer pay small heed to the things of the world, because, being always with God, they are raised so high above temporal things that they almost lose sight of them. . . .

"The soul is in mystic silence when, speechless before other creatures and before God Himself, her inmost being listens intently; by this silence she gives great glory to God. The soul gains immense benefits from silence, for it loosens her hold on created things and draws her nearer to God, the sole source of purity. . . . God approaches us spiritually, moving the innermost depths of the heart, taking intimate possession of the soul so quietly that none can tell of His coming, but the result is shown by this: that whosoever is united to God is at one with His Spirit. Drown self in this ocean of holiness, of infinite purity, this is a venture where all loss is gain.

"For true prayer we must forget ourselves, must lose ourselves for God. Be not deceived, God does claim this sacrifice, without it He cannot guide us. The condition which He most desires for us is that of humiliation. It is not enough to be lowly before God, we must be nothing at all; He can create from nothing, that is the foundation upon which He builds. The more absolute our self-emptying the more He is able to do with us. Whatever God may give you, whatever He may take away, even though He may deprive you of everything you have, yield yourself completely to His dealing with you, be on His side against yourself and desire neither shelter nor support in anything.

"The more we seem to be forsaken by all else the less are we forsaken by God. He is never more constant in helping us than when He sees that all other help has failed.

"And if we may rely on Him when all else has failed us, how much more may we do so when we seem to be bereft of Himself."

This is a hard saying, and its purpose is not softened when she enlarges on it. The progress that lay before the souls on whom had been bestowed the fullest gift of prayer demanded courage, few had more reason to know it than Ste. Chantal.

"God weans the souls that are His, first from all pleasures of sense, secondly from intellectual delight, thirdly from dependence on human help, fourthly from spiritual delight; and fifthly God allows souls that are dear to Him to fall into a condition that seems to deprive them of all peace or confidence in Him. Such souls will find outward pleasure turn to bitterness, their mental powers will increase their unhappiness, the help of man will appear vain, and just when they seem to need it most they will lose their inward peace. It is good for a soul to lose everything in this way in order that, in complete deprivation, she may find in God her light, her life, her joy, her help, her covering, her haven, and her all."[1]

Ste. Chantal had passed through each of these five stages, but, as we have seen, the blessing she depicts as the sequel to them was not vouchsafed to her; light and joy had no place in her last years. To herself, however, her own experience never appeared to warrant any claim to the possession of special spiritual favours. "You ask me a difficult question when you ask my method of prayer," she wrote. "Alas, my daughter, it is ordinarily nothing but distraction and a little suffering; what else is to be expected of so poor a creature in the midst of so much business? And I tell you, plainly and in confidence, that it is nearly twenty years

[1] "Œuvres," vol. iii., p. 259.

since God withdrew from me all power of prayer by means of understanding and considering and meditating, and that all I can do is to fix myself simply upon God, uniting myself by complete surrender to His work in me, doing nothing save that to which it may please His infinite goodness to prompt me." [1]

Not unfittingly may these lines be taken as the summing up of Ste. Chantal's spiritual history; they are characteristic in their profound humility and in their unconsciousness of the achievement they imply. "All I can do is to fix myself simply upon God, uniting myself by complete surrender to His work in me." [2]

[1] "Œuvres," vol. ii., p. 506. [2] *Ibid.* vol. viii., 1968.

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